

JOKING
APART



THE HON.
MRS. DOWDALL





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JOKING APART

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BY THE
HON. MRS. DOWDALL
AUTHOR OF "THE BOOK OF MARTHA"



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
THE AUTHOR

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TO
LUCIE RALEIGH

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CHAPTER I : "JOKING APART"

JUST to show the sort of thing one has to put up with in life, take the writing of this book as an instance. It was getting along splendidly. Chapter after chapter was piled up ; the commonplaces of everyday life lay delicately unclothed upon the pages. All the neighbours—everybody's neighbours—were there, pinned down like butterflies ; their beauties and their bulgy eyes and their great number of legs ready for the inspection of the public. It is not every one who is quick enough to get a good look at butterflies and moths when they are flitting about, so it is best to keep them somewhere where we can get at them any time we like.

But there was no difficulty in all this. The trouble was with that section of the public which wants a magnifying glass and a dissecting implement before it can enjoy a

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pinned-out butterfly. Aunt Mary, who takes a view altogether different from mine on almost every subject, but who is really a very sound woman and a good judge of what people think, read through my manuscript and said :

“ But, my dear Martha, it is by no means clear what it is all about.”

This put me in a fever. If there is one thing I dislike more than another it is to be

told that something I am interested in is “ not clear.”

“ Well, it is certainly not thick,” I replied, my poor mind harking back, as it nearly

always does, to some such homely matter as the soup.

“ Now that is an excellent example of what I mean !” Aunt Mary complained.



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“I say that many things in your book are not clear, and your mind at once flies off on the word ‘clear,’ and you imagine yourself at table, with a greasy waiter leaning over your shoulder holding a plate of kidney purée in one hand and bouillon in the other. You forget that you don’t carry your audience with you.”

“You are not clear now, yourself,” I said with a certain pleasure. “Would you please strain your criticism once more and add a little bit more beef.”

“Well, for instance, you never explain where Millport is,” she began. “You don’t say how you came there, nor what sort of place it is.”

“But everybody understands that,” I argued. “We all come to live in a place in the same way ; by train, with furniture and linen, and a list of things to be done when we get there. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred we come because our husbands have got a job in the place. Very few people go to live anywhere for pleasure.”

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"I don't know anything about it," my aunt admitted, "except that it is usual to give some explanation. Writers generally begin by describing the sun setting behind the suburbs, or rising over the heart of the city. They give the general lie of the streets and the surrounding country. And if they are talking about the provinces they usually create an atmosphere of depression, and domestic smells, and balked desires, just to start off with."

"Will you write a description of my home?" I suggested. "Tell them that it is a solid enough house, stucco in front and bricks at the back; a cat-run and some laurel bushes facing the road, and a gardener and another cat-run behind the house. In the middle of the back cat-run there is a tennis net and three seedy deck-chairs, one of which supports a blonde authoress with ill-defined features, the other an aunt with a high forehead and ideals about literature; the third will shortly contain a husband who will come home in about half an hour with

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a pink evening paper. What is there in all that to cheer a reader who is in the same unfortunate position herself?”

“Still, they like to know,” said Aunt Mary. The gentle persistence of these mild women is what wrecks many homes, and was, I suppose, at the bottom of a good deal of martyrdom in the times of the Inquisition. We were silent. I was a little ruffled and bored, and Aunt Mary was planning a new attack in nearly the same place.

“You don’t describe your people, either,” she began again presently, boring away. It was like that bad moment when the dentist, having fitted a new spike on to his steam gimlet, says, “Now please, shall we go on? A little wider——”

“You don’t describe your people,” averred Aunt Mary. “You talk of Mrs. Beehive, and Reginald, and Polly, and the Henrys, and the Spicers, but you don’t give their heights or their features or circumstances, nor even tell us what rooms they are in when the conversations take place.”

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“But don’t you see, dear,” I explained, “that if I did that the Henrys would probably get a job in Edinburgh or Sheffield. Or Reginald and Polly might die, and their places be filled by a similar couple whose names were Tom and Katie. Then Reginald instead of having a fair moustache would have a dark beard, and so on, and make all the description wrong. It is much better to leave them quite free to look different in different towns. I believe if you think of all the great names you know in literature you will find that the make-up of most of them has been left to the imagination of the public. Take Noah—we all know the look of him, but there is no description of him anywhere. And there are many more of the same kind whom I could mention.”

“Well, well,” said Aunt Mary, “have it your own way, though I think you are wrong. But there is another thing. I don’t like your putting in Miss Brown’s letters. They are not in the spirit of the book, and they are a little vulgar in places, I think, if

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you will excuse my saying so. Those absurd names she gives to people do not deceive anybody, and the letters are calculated to do a great deal of harm. Louise made a great mistake in letting you have them.”

“Anyhow I asked Miss Brown,” I replied, “and she said I might do as I liked. She will never come back here, and the reason I wanted them is that my own view of Millport is one-sided. I have a filial sentiment for it, and I couldn’t describe it with the kind of photographic falsity which is sometimes a help when such an unstable person as myself is trying to set down emotional truths.”

“Still, I think it is a mistake,” said Aunt Mary. “I don’t like descriptions which, as you say, are like photographs. I never thought that Miss Brown showed much insight or tried to enter into the spirit of Millport society. But—joking apart—couldn’t you, Martha dear, write a nice little chapter, just giving a bird’s-eye view of the

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town, and explaining who all the people are who come into the book ? ”

I made several beginnings to please her, but it was no good. If I ever write a novel it will have no scenery, and no furniture, and very little gesture in it. People will speak as they do in nightmares, crowding round and peering into the sufferer's face, and the reader will gasp as he turns over to the other page, “ Oh ! There's Fred ! stop him ! He's going over the cliff ! ” But every reader must bring his own cliff. All that I supply is the dream people who have every one of them got faces which we have seen at one time or another.

CHAPTER II : CHINESE TORTURE

THE civilization of the Chinese is admittedly very old, and their forms of torture are supposed to be extremely subtle. Perhaps with great age has come the knowledge that the tortures which have occurred naturally to man since he first existed are not likely to be improved upon by those who wish to inconvenience their fellow-creatures. It is probable that the first human owner of a cave, gnawing his bone at the end of the family table, gnawed it in such a manner as to make some peculiar grating, slooping or gnashing sound which aroused the indignation of his hairy partner. It may almost be taken for granted that he forgot to help the stuffing. The rude physicians of that epoch would, in all likelihood, have testified that the cave ladies as a class were evasive and unruly, and that they would insist upon sitting round the fire

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capturing the parasites in one another's tresses instead of coming to bed at the proper



time. There can be no doubt that the children speedily acquired the habit of saying "What?" every few minutes, that the slaves hid things, that the dweller in the next cave was the earliest

inventor of a musical instrument, and that the first door which the first man put to his cave in self-defence banged the first time it was left ajar.

It may therefore be, for all we know, that the subtle devices called Chinese tortures are quite modern arrangements adapted to a frailer generation, and that the real old, original Chinaman just left his victims

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to suffer unprotected in an ordinary household. The prevaricating, garrulous female prisoners were, perhaps, shut up for years with a gentleman who slooped at his meals, thus killing two birds with one stone. The children who asked "Wha-at?" when their questions were answered for the first time were immured with parents who said "Waddear?" at the end of an animated description of a day's adventure. Prisoners of both sexes who left their clothes on the bathroom floor and never destroyed envelopes were served exclusively by maids who threw everything portable into the dustbin, except clothes, which they hung up in the wrong side of the wardrobe. People who laughed incessantly while they spoke kept house for those who grumphed and blew air through their cheeks at breakfast. They were a merry party in the prisons one way and another if you come to think of it!

And there was another very dreadful thing that I can hardly speak of. Taking one hundred as the maximum that anyone can

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understand of what is possible in human thought, the most loving hearts whose comprehension equalled, say, four, were given a love potion and immediately introduced to some lady or gentleman, equally tender and sincere, whose comprehension ran up sometimes as far as nine. This is not the same thing as being misunderstood. That is a grievance which no one really minds unless they are very hard at work altering their natural character ; as, for instance, when the born miser who has forked out three-and-sixpence instead of two shillings, after heart-breaking struggles with himself, says bitterly, " It is so horrid of you to suggest that I don't like giving money away. It hurts me far more than if you had accused me of something that I really do." But to return to the ninepence and fourpence. It is not misunderstanding ; it is what an earnest lady was heard saying at a party when the music stopped, " Of course I was never able to go *quite* all the way with John Stuart Mill."

If that lady had been John Stuart Mill's

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bosom friend he would have felt the remark as an awful blow. Can anything be more painful than for some one to refer to, let us say, the resemblance of the human skeleton to that of a pig and for his companion to reply with tears springing up from an injured, loving heart, "Oh, please don't talk like that! I hate it when you say such things. As if there could be any resemblance!" Of course it doesn't matter now and then, but if it is to go on all the time you can't do much better with a thumb-screw. One need not go far to see tortured men and women with their dear ones simply dancing on their vitals. The sharp intake of Reginald's breath is audible when Polly says at dinner, "My husband never can keep a toothbrush more than a fortnight, can you, Reggie? It gets in a perfectly impossible state. I have to——" etc. If Reggie tells a funny little story all about a spade—a story with a good point to it and quite impersonal—she will most probably blame him for vulgarity, yet his little story about the spade

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was as detached as a robin's song in December. It is the personal touch in speech which only the unimaginative can hear unmoved. Men have complained that they were obliged to say indecent things themselves as a protection against hearing some one else say something less indecent in an indecent way. By their method they shut the others up.

"What does he mean?" a woman asked on one of these occasions.

"Well, Polly gets so gross when she begins to talk about ordinary things," said Reginald, "that I have to shout out all I know about more difficult subjects for fear she should begin to attempt them."

"What did I say that was gross?" asked Polly, opening her large eyes.

"I don't want ever to remember what you said about the baby," Reginald answered with haste. "Let us talk about something else quickly; rape, sacrilege, anything you like, but don't mention the child's toes again."

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“But Reginald——” protested his wife.

“Silence, woman !” commanded Reginald, and when he had gone out of the room Polly said that she was quite coming round to the idea that women ought to vote. Men cared nothing whatever about children and lots of other things. They were so utterly material, and political life ought to have an element of delicacy and refinement to keep it on the highest level. As a child Reginald had, of course, suffered the usual forms of infant torture. He used, as we all did, to come into the drawing-room to see visitors. His sisters became inured to this, although it bored them. They got a certain interest out of the visitor’s appearance and tricks of manner, which were all reproduced with merciless accuracy in the schoolroom afterwards ; not ill-naturedly, but because they had been stored as sounds are stored on the phonograph. Reginald was more than bored ; he suffered from the personal attentions of his mother and her guests. Personal remarks always hit his comfort like unpleasant

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sounds hit the sense of music. "Where have you been?" his mother would ask, which she would not have done if they had been alone, because she knew that there was practically nowhere to go except the park. Then began the old, old rigmarole: how he had grown, whom he was like, what form of exercise he took—there is no need to go into details, because we are all familiar with the stupid, tactless business. We have all sat and simmered while the little creatures stand kicking one foot against the other until we release them from our impertinence. Then his mother either repeated something he had told her in confidence the day before, or she made affected use of his schoolboy slang as if it were her own, or she blew his nose with her handkerchief, and showed off generally, and made him show off, and it was all beastly. He suffered incessantly from this showing off on everybody's part. In his public-school days his sisters showed off when he came home. They borrowed his forms of speech. These were not his

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own to begin with, but they were the language of his tribe, and what was his by capture was theirs by theft, which is quite different and creates a false situation. He never got at these facts by himself, but he felt uneasy and strained. Later on he much preferred strangers to his own family, because they kept out of his bathroom and he was free to present his own idea of himself without the risk of some one remarking across the table, "Why, Reggie! You *loathe* poetry! How can you! You always said it was such humbug!" We can never alter or enlarge our tastes in the family circle. A strict record is kept of all our utterances, and they are brought up against us as if we had crossed the floor of the House of Commons. Strangers take all for gospel and do not know what we said last year.

But apart from Reggie's little troubles, we all have our own. For instance, there is the torture by question. This is suitable for both men and women, and it is most

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effective, perhaps, when administered by women, because they have the pertinacity of insects and cannot be got rid of; slapping doesn't destroy them. You may even burn sulphur, it doesn't keep them off a bit. Remember, it was a poor, lorn widow who defeated the unjust judge. If her husband had been there he would have blushed and said, "Come away, Maria—it's no good—he won't listen." But Maria lit once more upon the bald head of the judge and set up her interminable buzz, and lo! the thing was done.

The following scene illustrates how the torture by question is administered :

SCENE. A cosy apartment (the only one in which there is a fire after breakfast) provided with a telephone. The meals are ordered for the day. You have seen about the children's spring hats, you have telephoned for a man to see about the knife machine. "Seeing" stands for opening it to get out the knife which cook dropped in without thinking, and that means ten shillings,

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"for man's time—rep. kn. mach." There does not seem to be anything else to see about just at present, and you settle down to a bit of crochet or, perhaps, to some occupation which takes your whole thought, such as writing a story for the magazines.

Cook slides round the door and looks at you. At the sight of her, all your ideas get up and say they are afraid they must be going. Ideas don't like cook, because she doesn't like them. She has a heavy hand with them and they won't settle.

"Yes, cook, what is it?" you ask.

"If you please'm, the butcher hasn't veal to-day."

"Hasn't he?" you say patiently, "then tell him to raise some animal that he has got."

You wait, pencil in hand, for her to go.

"What shall I order, m'm?" she insists.

"The boy is waiting."

You quickly review last week's meals. The household has had cutlets, fish, fowl, steak and a good many other things. Some

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people dislike the insides of animals so we will not complete the list. Anyhow, they seem to have eaten everything that there is in the world, except veal. Your horizon is all veal. There doesn't, in fact, seem to be anything but veal to eat, "without," as cook says, you have just what you had yesterday. The sudden passionate anger of the interrupted flies to your head.

"I don't care if it's stewed missionary," you stammer; "but I will have something new. Go away quickly and think of something."

Cook, like the fly, takes wing as far as the kitchen dresser and returns; stands once more, as it were, washing her front legs in the doorway.

"May I telephone, please, m'm?" see inquires.

You sharpen your pencil meanwhile, and there is a faint rustle in the air as of lost ideas peeping round to see whether every one has gone.

"H'm, h'm (a little cough from the

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direction of the telephone). If you please'm, Jones says that the haddock isn't very nice to-day ; he has some nice turbot at two-and-sixpence."

"Ask the silly idiot if he sends up turbot for his own nursery breakfast, will you," is the only reply your indignation will afford. Goodness knows what all the haddock are about in these days ; they always used to be "nice" at any time of year.

"Shall I tell him not to trouble about it, m'm?" she says, holding the receiver away from her ear.

"Oh, yes, don't let him break up his health over it," you say, and once more resume your work. Your quiet room is now, in your imagination, a seething, noisy mass of food, all of it quarrelling as to who shall climb on to the table at dinner.

"What shall I order for breakfast instead of the fish?" demands cook, lightly poised for flight beside the writing-table.

"Bacon," you say, "bacon, bacon, bacon," and you look up hoping to see a mess of

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squashed cook on the blotting-paper. But not at all. She is round the other side, tickling your left ear.



“The bacon’s finished to-day, m’m. Did you remember to order any more?”

“Are the hens all dead?” you inquire.

“Oh, no, m’m, I don’t think so.”

“Very well then, squeeze them and go away.”

And then when the same old scrambled eggs, too heavily salted, come up next morning for breakfast she will have the effrontery to say that you ordered them!

What does the perfect woman do in these circumstances? Does she put down her occupation and say, “Dear me, cook, what a pity, isn’t it! What shall we do?” and does cook reply, “It is a pity, isn’t it,

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m'm ! I don't know what to suggest, I'm sure. Would you like a nice egg ? ” and then does the perfect woman say, “ Well, you know we had eggs yesterday, cook, but I don't see what else we are to do. It's very awkward. But you can't have anything nicer than eggs, can you ? Suppose you get some eggs, and if you tell me when they arrive I will come down and look at them.” I believe it is this quality that makes women easier to rear than men. You can't kill them by ordinary methods.

There is one more form of torture which no quiet home ought to be without if there is a contemplative enemy to be destroyed. It is called the torture by vivacity. The sort of thing you get in this book, only worse. The victim is put down in any ordinary chair, rather too near the fire if possible, and then the torturer begins. “ What plays did you see when you were up in town ? Can't remember ! Well you *are* ! You ought to have seen Such-and-such. Do you know the story ? There's a man who's

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tremendously in love with a girl and she won't have him. Eileen Protheroe takes the part—don't you admire her? of course you do—what nonsense! Don't try to be clever—that's your way. Well, she's absolutely splendid in this. She comes on in a wonderful dress of pale champagne with heliotrope, most beautifully draped, and her hair done wonderfully under a small hat. Well, she won't have him, but she tries for Tom—let me see—what is his name? What was the name of that friend of yours whom you used to see sometimes in Buxton? Awfully smart, in a brown suit—oh, you must remember— Well, this man reminded me of him—you must know whom I mean—don't be silly. Anyhow this man is just like him——”

My pen has fallen off the table in a fit and is panting on the mat, protesting that it cannot run another inch.

CHAPTER III : THE MARRIAGE OF HENRY

IT must be funny to have the partner of one's life say, "You are quite beyond me, Henry dear, altogether." It must give one such a shock, although of course it is true. Henry is so far removed from Mrs. Henry that if they manage to keep within calling distance of one another all their lives they are said to be "quite an idyllic couple." We all know that if two people are knocking about idly in a field, one of them looking for golf balls or beetles or a lost trifle from the pocket, the other sewing or aimlessly preoccupied with thoughts about moth in the cupboards or the drawing in of the days, their conversation is not likely to be either profound or meaty ; nor can it be even that interchange of feather-weight looks and intonations which are the pollen of mutual understanding. Mr. and Mrs. Henry's life is very like this sort of

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knocking about together in a field. Sometimes Henry wanders off and says something with a little more ginger to it, and then Mrs. Henry is exceedingly offended, and complains that he is quite beyond her altogether.

The Henrys have not drifted apart lately ; they are as near together now as ever they were. In fact, they are far less likely to drift apart now than they were at first. They are kept together by the strong tie of habit, and, some say, by public opinion. Others maintain that although public opinion prevents Henry from ever thinking of bolting, if he did entertain the thought public opinion would have less hold upon him than would his deep-rooted habit of staying with his wife. Thirty years ago they were kept together by a different tie, which might easily have been broken had either of them thought to break it. The tie was a sort of chemical affinity fortified by conscience. Love in all its expressions is more like something chemical than anything else,

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and the chemical experiment of Mr. and Mrs. Henry's marriage was, at one time, a very touch-and-go business. Chemical affinity caught them as they meandered at a garden-party; it kept them together at several subsequent entertainments, just because neither of them were the sort of atoms that are so—I don't know the right expression; it may be volatile, I call it impulsive—as ever to unglue themselves from the atom they chance to unite with, unless under great provocation from some other very masterful atom.

Henry was not such a gluey, adhesive atom as Mrs. Henry, but he had a conscience, and a dash of imagination or poetry or something. He saw much that was invisible to Mrs. Henry, and he saw it better when there was a female figure in the foreground of what he saw, giving just the human touch to the picture. When he became attached to Mrs. Henry he kept his attention riveted on her without an idea of the dangers by which their union was beset.

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There were hundreds of brilliant and powerful atoms whirling past under his very nose, but their chemical attraction was neutralized for him by the fact that he never lifted his eyes from Mrs. Henry and his dreams. This instinct of keeping the eye of love fixed on the beloved object is implanted in the heart of man by the god of populations, who knows that marriages must be kept going—the Henry kind of marriages anyhow. It is impossible to stop and consider each case separately.

“You must get on, Mr. Cupid ; move quickly, please. Pair them off—(we can see the testy old gentleman in the spectacles)—yes, yes, just like the frogs, certainly ; we must get on. There’s this batch of babies to be got off at once to keep up the numbers. So—Harper, Harthorn ; Jones, Johnson ; Smith, Smithson. Couple them up, please, anyhow. Light and dark alternately if you can ; don’t put two tall ones together, nor two dwarfs if you can help it ; mix the temperaments as much as possible——” Cupid

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strikes ; stops dead. "I refuse, sir. I am very sorry, but there are two here whom you must let me consider, please. The very foundations of your throne will be shaken if these are ill-assorted. Very dangerous elements to combine, these two, sir. Very little known about their action——"

My metaphors are getting so mixed that it will soon be impossible to disentangle them. What I meant was that although it is said to be in the nature of atoms to stick together until one or other leaves for some more powerful attraction, in the case of the human atom a protective quality has been given which enables them to resist other attractions so long as they do not look about and consider. This saves a lot of time for the testy old gentleman in spectacles.



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In fact, the work would never get done otherwise ; there would be a dozen changes of plan before any marriage came off.

But it was touch-and-go many a time with Henry had he but known. Atoms came near his path, which, had they drawn him to themselves, might have brought about a richer fact than that which is called the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Henry.

For although they have lived together so long, he is still altogether beyond her, and she is (though he does not mention this) altogether beyond him. They hear each other saying things all day, but, in so far as speech is a meeting ground for thought, they have never spoken to one another. If Henry were a lop-eared rabbit he could not expect less from each day as it dawns. He expects breakfast (dear thing), but then so does Bunny, and he expects other meals throughout the day. He expects his house to be made clean, and Mrs. Henry on the one hand and the gardener on the other very kindly see to that. He expects changes in

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the weather, in the seasons, in the dawn and fading of day ; but he expects no other change. How surprised Henry or the rabbit would be at anything unusual in the behaviour of Mrs. Henry or the gardener. Suppose Mrs. Henry were to say with sincerity, "I think so-and-so," instead of "I always say so-and-so." Suppose that she showed by a sudden look of life behind her eyes that for one moment her thought had stood beside his thought and had seen what he saw. Nothing in the papers would, I believe, surprise poor Henry more than if this happened, for in these thirty years it has never occurred once.

At first in his humility he thought that it was because her thoughts were above the range of his coarse words ; that when she said, "Yes, dear, quite so," it meant that she was reaching down to grasp his idea, and that when she had pulled it up beside hers he would see to a distance he had never seen before. But, instead, he found that he never reached her mind at all ; he called to

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her and she answered as people answer on a golf-course, or in the street, or in the hall of an hotel, with lookers-on within hearing, careful of the prejudices of society. But just where she stood he never knew, of what she saw he had no idea. He sometimes thought that her dwelling must be under a green canvas umbrella behind a mole-hill. Then Henry became more and more exclusively male. The chemical tie between him and her had been strengthened by conscience and habit until there was very little fear of the busy old gentleman's plans being upset by any untoward volatility on the part of atom Henry. But perhaps if Henry had heard some of the things his wife said when she was driven to involuntary candour by the weight of many years' disgust with the male sex, he might have—oh no, hardly that ! She must have a home and so on. And then the fuss ! fancy inquiries and no real reason to give ! Besides, she was a very good sort of woman. Women would not be such faithful mothers, perhaps,

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if they were not rather limited in their desires : no man could stand the strain of what they have to put up with. So Henry would surely reflect, and as he reflected he would put his hand in his pocket with the ease of habit, and pay the tax-collector, and the doctor, and the gardener, and the schoolmaster and all of them.

“Of course, my ideal,” says Mrs. Henry in confidence to Mrs. James, “is to have a nice house quite in town ; close to the trams, so that there is no difficulty in getting about in the evening. If you dine out two or three times a week, and pay a cab each time, it runs up so—but men never think of these things !” Henry does think of them a good deal, but paying the cab bill is a mild and peaceful occupation compared to getting into evening clothes half an hour after he comes home, in order to sit through a long evening between two women, one of whom looks like a muffin which has fallen, wet, into a box of cheap jewellery, and the other looks

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like a cormorant who has just been converted to some rather faddy new religion.



He has to turn from one to the other for two hours, as sweet-bread succeeds fish; and when the women have gone, and the pleasant smile has

left his face, he is obliged to follow them almost immediately (for, after all, what is half an hour's rest?), and stand about suffering all sorts of torture, music perhaps, or more rot from a pair of lacy old idiots. And then to be driven home too late to do anything; for you can't sit up at night if you have to be off early next day. It is all very well now and then, for a change, and to go to people whom you like——

Let us now hear some more of what Mrs. Henry really, really thinks.

“You know,” she says, “children are a

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great tie." I wish that some one would explain exactly what they mean by this remark. Suppose that children are a tie to bind Mrs. Henry down from those wild flights of adventure and the freedom of the buccaneer to which she is naturally prone, well, what a pity ! However, we all admit that they are a great tie. Their childish thoughts are such a dull field in which to confine the brilliancy of mamma's reflections on Hall Caine or the ladies whom she knows, or our spiritual nature in general. Of course they are not nearly so great a tie to a man.

Now Henry has got so used to looking at things in one way that he would agree to this proposition, because he knows quite well that he never in his life sat up with baby, no matter what was wrong, while Mrs. Henry never left the children at all if they were ill ; and she never got away for a whole morning like he did. Why, he could fritter away the whole day at the office and never be called off for anything !

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But then, if the chemical attraction that brought him and her together had contained a spark of anything like laughter, he would have made his own ribs ache and hers too when she said that children were no tie to a man. If they tie her to the house what else, in heaven's name, ties him to the office? Isn't he bound to his stool by cords woven of school bills, doctor's and dentist's bills, rent for larger, airier premises, the elaborate "summer out" in seaside lodgings instead of the cheap holidays in god-painted solitudes before the nursery days?

But then, as Mrs. Henry so justly says, a man never thinks of these things. Perhaps it is as well that he doesn't or we might none of us be here, either to write or read this captious book.

Such analytical thoughts do not amuse the Henrys, and quite rightly. He sometimes had freakish moments, and gay imaginings flew high through his head thirty years ago. There were all sorts of merry firework stuff ready to burst into Catherine-wheels and

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"God Bless our Home," if anyone had brought a little living spark of fire to set it off. But Mrs. Henry does not think in that way. There never seems to be anything to laugh at that she can see, although she enjoys a joke as much as anybody.



But what is so amusing about the whole thing is that under the canvas umbrella behind the molehill where Mrs. Henry lives, there is a strange life that is quite beyond Henry altogether. There are large qualities like unselfishness, innocence, courage. In case of fire or flood Mrs. Henry would save all the children, or even Henry himself, at the cost of her life, without a thought beyond annoyance at the incompetence of men who build houses that catch fire like flannelette.

Virtues like those would be brilliant

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objects if they were taken into the air and allowed to mix freely with vices, so that we could have a good look at both and decide which we prefer, honestly and without prejudice on either side. If, instead of stuffing all the vices into a box where they get mouldy and breed maggots, and instead of keeping all the virtues folded up with a string round them and a macintosh over the top, they were both taken out and used as occasion offered, Mr. and Mrs. Henry might find it necessary to approach one another enough to hand things backwards and forwards. And so they might eventually get talking, and neither be quite beyond the other any more.

CHAPTER IV : THE SECOND SISTER'S HUSBAND

GOING into town one day I met two people on the road. One was a gloomy-looking elderly woman in a bonnet and the kind of things that go with bonnets ; the other was a young, probably married, girl, who walked by her side, and on whom the burden of conversation seemed to lie. The burden was heavy, but, if it had not been, neither of the women could have handled it. I used to wonder why the commercial travellers who called at our door never had any needles smaller than a small sausage-skewer. Then one day a quite nice woman with whom I was sewing remarked, " It's no use giving me a needle like that, my dear, I should be dropping it all the time ; I should never know I had it in me hand." The same thing happens in conversation. Many people do not know it is there unless you cut it a bit thick " so as

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they can get a hold of it." And not only must they be able to grasp it, but it must stay quietly where it is for some time. It must be a sort of parcel that you can carry in your arms and then hand to some one else. None of that juggling with balls, which some author speaks of as a desirable form of conversation.

"And your second sister's husband, Mrs.—er—, is he still alive?" said the younger woman to the elder as I passed them. It is funny, now you come to think of it, how we never can remember our friends' names "without we think," as they say in Millport. "Mrs.—er—" is the usual form of address, I find, and we repeat it constantly ; perhaps in the hope that by and by the name will come back to us.

"And your second sister's husband, Mrs.—er—, is he still alive?" I nearly said it to the ticket man at the booking office. Instead I leaned over the little opening and said, "Third return Southfield, Mr.—er—, thank you—pleasant change after the rain,

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isn't it? It is indeed, thank you. You haven't got two halfpennies for a penny, have you? Oh, never mind, don't trouble; but it's handy to have about you; saves waiting for the change sometimes if you're in a hurry." Then I dropped a shilling on the ground and fell over the man behind me.



In the train I found myself in imagination again pursuing the second sister's husband. Was he still alive or not? He had married into the family of those strange, flat sisters, who looked like vegetables. He and the first sister's husband were, probably, very much alike; only one was called Tom and the other Willie, and one did well and the other didn't. Unfortunately the first sister's husband had been conversationally disposed of before I met the elder and the younger

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lady, so it was impossible to decide whether he were still alive or not. Perhaps he had been carted away in a hearse, followed by six or seven cabs full of black people, all minding their own business, but glad to get a nice drive and a bit of rest ; pleased also to see Annie and her husband, who had come over from Manchester for it, and Willie's nephew, who had got a day off

from the works. It was all very nice, but a pity about poor Willie—ah, dear me, yes, to be sure—a nice bit of country you pass through on the way to the cemetery—yes, indeed ; and how they are building out in that direction too ! I went all the way to Willie's funeral with that lugubrious lady in the

bonnet, and thoroughly enjoyed the trip. But still the problem vexed me—her second



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sister's husband ; was he still alive ? Probably not so well in his health, anyhow, as he used to be, poor fellow ! But the three sisters would most likely go on for some time. Sisters are easier to rear as babies and they last longer, for they don't trouble their heads so much. It is worry kills people, and a hen does not worry much. It squawks and flutters if anything comes on it, sudden-like, but it'll soon settle down again and pick its food and lay another egg if you give it time—eh, dearie me, yes, to be sure !

I finished up the afternoon at a tea-party, and sat next to a lady whom I had met before but did not really know. I think that I must have fallen asleep for a moment, because I suddenly found myself looking at her with a glassy eye and asking, “And your second sister's husband, Mrs.—er—, is he still alive ?”

No—nothing happened. It was at a time of year when the days are closing in—we had all just remarked on the fact—

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and my lucky star was twinkling through a gap in the curtains.

“He’s very well, thank you, Mrs.—er—,” replied my neighbour with a pleased smile. “He’s doing very well now. You knew he’d been ill, of course—so good of you to ask—but they think he’s quite turned the corner now.”

I wonder if she saw my blushes. Perhaps she put them down to the tea ; and there was a good fire going too. Some of us, I remember, preferred to sit a little away from it, thank you ; there’s always a risk in going out afterwards. I had been so successful that I ventured again and asked, “Has your sister many children ?” “Oh, just the three she’s always had,” was the alarming reply I got. “Did something prick you, Mrs.—er—?” she asked kindly. “Oh, that’s all right. I thought you seemed to give a jump. No, just the same three. The eldest, you know, are at school, and there’s the baby. He’s just two now ; such a nice age !”

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“Do you think so?” I said, I couldn’t resist it; it was what the young lady in the shop had said to me that morning when I told her I would rather have a boot that fitted me. Of course, two is a nice age, but if you only knew how often I have heard the same thing said about every child, from an infant a day old to a great dolloping creature of fifteen, with spots——!

“Oh, I think so, don’t you?” said the poor thing, a little surprised. “They’re just beginning to pick up everything, aren’t they?”

“Yes,” I answered bitterly, “measles and pins, and all sorts of things. It’s wonderful how they do it, isn’t it?”

Some one began to sing just then so we had to be quiet. Everybody hushed, except two old ladies who looked up in surprise at the sudden silence, and I caught the concluding sentence of one of them, “Windermere, did you say? Oh, very nice indeed, for those that like foliage.”

After the song my neighbour left me

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and went to our hostess. The business of good-byes had begun. "Oh, it isn't late,



Mrs. Deane, you mustn't think of going." "I am afraid I must be going, thank you. Mind you come and see us some day soon—yes, any day, just look us up. No, I've given

up my Thursdays now. I found it cut up the week so, and one day doesn't suit everybody—no, of course not—and if you've another engagement it's awkward to break it, isn't it? Well, you won't forget? That's right—and bring baby. She'd love to play with Sammy and Edna. We've the new nursery now, you know. A great improvement. Oh yes, the other wasn't half large enough. No, it doesn't do not to have enough room. You're well off

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here, aren't you? Such a lovely outlook! and the bushes quite cut you from the houses——”

They were both standing all this time with the front door open behind them. Our hostess had rung the bell, and the parlour-maid was waiting in a thorough draught (she had come up in the middle of her tea, I believe, as she looked a little crumby about the apron and not very pleased). “Well, Mrs.—er—, I mustn't keep you. Don't come out, please, you'll take cold. Is this your hall? How well the prints look? You must get your husband to come round and have a look at ours——” Our hostess came back at the end of twenty minutes and went straight to the fire to warm herself. But some one else was ready to go then, and the same ceremony had to be repeated.

The second sister's husband must be a plucky man the way he clings to life; but, after all, he's not much in the house. When I married I was told by an authority on provincial etiquette that it was not looked

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upon with favour if any female guest were found in the house after the man's hour for coming home. Being fresh from the school-room, and not having noticed during my excursions downstairs any arbitrary distinction of sex in the matter of visitors, I found this rule a little difficult to understand. But in a year or two it became not only an excusable breach of hospitality, but an obvious necessity if the breadwinner's life

was to be prolonged. My own second sister's husband, who is extraordinarily patient and fairly inattentive, would, I am sure, have jibbed if he had ever been asked whether he did not find his work a

great strain, his children a great relaxation, his hobby a great expense and his politics a



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great mistake. Besides, he loathes standing in a draught with his hat off, and not one of the kind of women who call on me would sit on his chair and twiddle his whiskers, which my sister Maud says is what he really likes. So, when anyone asks me whether my second sister's husband is still alive, I shall tell them that he is, and why. Perhaps it will be a warning to them to take more care of poor Tom and Willie.

CHAPTER V : WHY NOT REST?

IF you say you can't go to bed, the doctor says "Boo ! Let somebody else do the work. What are your servants for ?" You try to explain that you can't leave a baby with a cook. He replies that it won't hurt your husband to have a cold dinner for once. You explain with infinite patience, slowly and as grammatically as possible, that it is not a question of dinner, but that cook doesn't understand what baby wants. Then the doctor crams on his hat and says that inexperienced people make the best nurses, and will you be in bed, please, in half an hour from now, and don't get up until he sees you again the day after to-morrow.

At first it is rather nice, having a fire lit in your bedroom, ordering tea to be brought up, beginning a new novel, drawing the blinds, and lighting a little silver lamp.

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Cook says that she can manage Master Tommy splendidly until nurse comes back. It is a pity Maggie has to count the laundry to-day, but it can't be helped.

The bed is soft and warm ; the hot-bottle is almost as good as a visit to the Riviera ; you turn the pages of your novel.

A piercing shriek rends the air—and another—and another—hot and damp with terror, your heart galloping like a fire engine, you are in the nursery—no time for a dressing-gown. It is impossible to say which is making the most noise, the baby or the cook. “Yeow, yeow, yeow, yeow, — hush, hush — yeow, yeow, yeow — there, there, there : there’s a pretty boy—upsy-daisy ! peek-a-boo ! yeow, yeow——” “Exactly



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what I told that vile doctor would happen," you mutter, stopping your ears. "Don't rock him like that!" you bawl. "Beg pardon, m'm?" inquires cook, with a smile and cocking one ear at you while the baby's head swings now to the lamp above his head, now down to the ground, missing the coal-scuttle by a hair's breadth. "Beg pardon, m'm? I'm sorry he's disturbed you. Upsy-daisy! We've been getting on capitally."

Struggling between politeness and gratitude, fear of offending the cook (it is the great dread that hangs over us all), and the murderous instinct of the parent whose young has been annoyed, you take your offspring on your knee and offer him your humble apologies, while cook runs off "just a moment to see to the kettle."

Ten minutes elapse. You are getting very cold in your little cambric nightgown. The baby is inclined to be exacting, like one who brings a petition for heavy damages for a small injury. He is rather jumpy in the

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nerves, and inclined to be suspicious and contradictory.

“Why don’t you want me to break that cup?” is the kind of question that he asks, “Why don’t you? Why”—increasing to a wail—“why don’t you? Will you tell me why you don’t want that cup broken——” “Oh hang!” you say, “because I don’t. What on earth is cook doing?” You are hot now instead of cold. “Do play with your soldiers, Tommy.” “Why do you look like that?” says Tommy, beginning to cry. “What’s that on your cheek?” he demands suddenly, fingering your pet mole with a sticky finger. It is now twenty minutes since cook left the room. You ring the bell violently.

“Why do you ring the bell?” asks Tommy, now weeping unrestrainedly. “I don’t want you to ring the bell—I want my tea—I want Nanny—I don’t want medicine—I don’t want you to ring the bell—my tooth is sore—I want Nanny——”

Cook comes rushing up. “Sorry to have kept you, m’m,” she says, “but I had to

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chop a few sticks for the kettle ; the fire had gone that low. Now, master, come to me and we'll ride-a-cock-horse."

There is nothing for it. Tommy's interest is on one side, a long life of seclusion in the asylum on the other. Tommy must go to the wall.

"I think I wouldn't move him about, Jane," you say. "If you will read to him and give him his tea he will be quite happy." Then you escape with a heart of lead and ears of granite, and lay you down once more. You get hot and cold alternately as occasional faint screams reach you from the nursery. The coals fall, one by one, lower in the grate. The fire is nearly out. You see the cold, grey trees waving outside the window. The hot-bottle got chilled while you were in the nursery. The only warm thing in the room is your pillow which is boiling——

Pop-op-op-op-bang !

That is how Maggie always announces her presence. She staggers into the cold twilight,

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bearing an immense tray with tea sufficient for a school feast, and all the other items on her long menu are stale and tasteless. The butter is so shivering with cold that it is only able to clutch a few crumbs out of the bread, and these lie petrified on its chilly flakes. The sandwiches are too small, dry besides, and the jam inside them is an old enemy. The cake is last week's: one of Jane's failures, which, as she says, "seems to hang on a long time." Maggie sweeps your book, your lamp, and everything you are likely to want off the table, and plants her horrid collection of uneatables in their place, lights a flaring gas immediately in front of your eyes and prepares to depart. "Maggie," you say (how hatefully irksome it is to ask for the obvious when one is ill), "would you please draw the blinds, and make up the fire, and put out that gas, and bring me back my lamp and books."

Oh, why did you ever let her go near the grate? It would have been chilly work

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making up the fire yourself, but next time—
a thousand times Yes.

Banger, banger, banger, racker, racker, racker, PONG ! racker, racker, racker, rack, rack, rack, PONG ! PONG !! PONG !!! Your spinal cord splits in sympathy with the brave lump of coal which has held out so long against Maggie's invincible poker, and which now retreats in a million fragments to the other end of the room. Shovel, ovel, ovel, ovel—shovel, ovel, ov—— “Surely that is enough, Maggie ; you will make it so black,” you venture at last.

Down come the blinds with a sickening rattle, and you are left to take what comfort you can from the cold, strong tea (she has forgotten the hot water and the bell is at the other end of the room), the shivering butter, and the stern, unpopular cake. These sit on like unwelcome guests, hour after hour. There is no room for anything else on the table, and there they remain ; that horrible cake staring into the fire, just

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like the kind of person who sits on and on after tea, and breaks your marked silence by asking, "Have you heard anything from Annie lately?" and futilities of that sort. The butter, perhaps, is prepared to leave, and says, "Well, we ought to be getting home, I suppose; we've paid you quite a visitation." But the cake takes no notice whatever, and the sandwiches stand about on the tray, fingering things and asking, "That's new, isn't it? Who gave it you?" and so on. If Maggie had had the intuition of a louse she would have announced their cab—I mean she would have carried them away—ages and ages ago.

It is impossible to read with the cake looking like that. You doze—a feverish, thirsty doze. Dinner will have to be very tactfully presented. You wonder whether Jane will have thought of sweetbread or what. The bed is very crumby. Can that odious cake having been leaning over us to see whether we were asleep, whispering, perhaps, "Well, good-bye then, I won't

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disturb you?" Probably the sandwiches giggled and said, "Don't get up, we can let ourselves out." The sandwiches' names are Catherine and Agnes, and one is thirty-seven and the other thirty-one; both are unmarried and very fond of us.

Hang the cake! Why couldn't it go when it saw we were asleep, without spilling those wretched crumbs. One is just in the small of our back and another is under our left leg. How hot the bed is!

Pop-op-op-bang! Crash!

The door-handle all but went through the looking-glass that time. Maggie pushes the door gently after her with her leg as she comes in.

"Shall I put it on the bed, m'm?"

You start up in a fright. The cake has not gone after all; it is still there, looking very hard and seedy and disapproving. And there are those silly sandwiches looking with disdain on the new tray with the new

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batch of arrivals. But their disdain is nothing to your disgust. Sweetbread, did you say? "It's stewed steak, m'm," says Maggie, "won't you have any?"

Stewed steak! Grey, heavy, steaming, thick, nutritious, and garnished with two potatoes, very blue about the lips, and an ample supply of cabbage! "Take it away at once, please," you say in trembling tones, "and that horrible tea too. I don't want anything," you add, deeply injured.

"There's roly-poly pudding, m'm, and macaroni cheese," says Maggie; "will you have both?"

You are very hot by the time she quite understands. The crumbs in the bed are like living coals, and Maggie was in such a hurry to get away that she did not notice the fire. You get up and remake the bed, fetch hot water, wash, and return to bed shivering. Then a kind and anxious husband, with a peculiarly pungent cigar, comes up and reports that the macaroni cheese is excellent, won't you have some?

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You drop into a sound sleep at about ten, which is the hour Maggie selects to "do" the washstand and tidy the room. If any one has not the experience or the imagination to supply details of the subdued clatter of soap-dishes and glasses, varied by heavy falls of coal and hair-brushes, or of the piercing squeak of each drawer as it opens and shuts, neither will they realize the significance of a basin-cloth left on the floor just where it catches the eye. At about eleven you probably rise, seize its clammy edge between your finger and thumb, and fling it into the passage. After this you return to the cold bottle and the hot crumbs that were not all brushed out when you remade the bed.

Morning dawns brightly with the prospect of a pleasant day of peace and leisure. You make your own bed, and perform an elaborate toilet between early tea and breakfast, so that by eight o'clock you are sitting up, good and happy, waiting for a lightly boiled egg. At eight-fifteen an agitated husband enters,

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looking at his watch, and says he will just go down and hurry them up. Punctuality is your especial fad, and unpunctuality is Maggie's, so by eight-thirty you are already warm with the heat of battle. You rehearse your displeasure beforehand. Bitingsarcasms, haunting home truths, pungent, pathetic appeals to humanity and reason are prepared by your active brain, already aglow with the necessity for being "after" every dratted person in the house if any hanged thing is to get done.

At half-past eight the door is flung open with the inevitable crash, and reason and eloquence give place to the stronger spirits of fear and gratitude. You mentally apologize to Maggie for all the things you were going to say. Your heart is wrung when you see her staggering under a load of silver jugs and entrée dishes, two loaves, a ham, and five plates with knives and forks to match.

"I am sorry the master was obliged to complain about breakfast being late, m'm,"

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says Maggie, looking like a thunderstorm with heart disease. She disposes the feast all over your room, plates on the top of your clothes, two entrée dishes at your feet (just where you can't reach them without spilling the tea), and the ham on the washstand. "I had to get the extra dishes out of the plate chest," pursues Maggie reproachfully, "and they were all to polish before I could take them down to the kitchen."

To explain just then the ideal breakfast in bed would involve "suiting yourself" in a month, or, more probably, recantation, explanations, tears, emotions, and all sorts of luxuries in which you are unwilling to indulge Maggie at the moment, so you decide to wait for more settled weather. At ten o'clock the entrée dishes are still weighing heavily on your toes, you have heard tradesmen's boys come and go (repeated falls of plaster from the ceiling and sudden shocks to your frame have betrayed their several applications to the bell), but cook has had no orders and it is certain that

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she will not act without them. This means that nothing will arrive in time for anything throughout the day, and the master will consult his watch, and your temperature will rise from nervous apprehension before every meal. Also, you would like your room tidied. Where have all those miserable women gone? They seem to disappear like worms into the sand and all is silent as the grave. You tumble out of bed again and go to the bell. If the tradesmen's boys can raise the dead and restore the deaf to hearing, shall our efforts not be equally blessed? At last you get hold of the cook. She had not come up for fear of disturbing you. She has no ideas at all about food. "Would you fancy some stewed steak for lunch? There doesn't seem to be much else to have, without you have the hot-pot—oh yes, of course there is the fish if you care for that; would it be substantial enough for the master? Oh, beg pardon, she understood for lunch and dinner both—quite so. Would master fancy roly-poly pudding and

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macaroni cheese? Yes, he had them last night, but she thought he liked them better than anything else—and there didn't seem to be much else at this time of year, without you went to the expense of fruit——”

“Now I suppose,” you reflect afterwards, “that that ass of a doctor would say, why don't I order what I like for myself. Could Cleopatra have had the energy to order anything but an asp for herself after she had ‘seen about’ the figs for the rest of the household?”

Clara has now been up and dusted under the bed. Does any happy, hearty, healthy person know what this means? If not, let him take the next time when he is tired and in a temper, and let him lie on two chairs and get a child to joggle all the legs of them in turn.

You doze.

Pop-op-op-op-BANG!

“If you please'm, Mrs. Jameson has rung

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up to say, could you lunch with her to-day at one-thirty?"

"I suppose you didn't think of telling her I was in bed?" you suggest.

"No, m'm, I thought you might wish to speak to her yourself."

You doze.

Pop——pop (very gently). Jane enters.

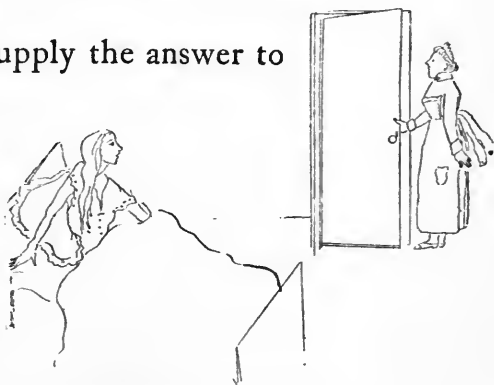
"Please'm, did you telephone for the fish?"

Any amateur can supply the answer to this question.

You sleep.

Pop - op - op - op -
BANG!

You were so sound asleep that you could only catch the concluding words of Maggie's sentence: ". . . and she thought, m'm,



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perhaps you'd like to look at the pipe where it's burst."

(A few minutes later) "... nor you don't wish to see the man?"

"I think not, thank you. I could draw him with my eyes shut."

"Would you wish me to telephone or will you?"

"!!!—and while you are about it, Maggie, you might bring some coal."

She brings it in three-quarters of an hour, when you have got nicely off to sleep again, and before a fresh piece of coal can be put on the fire the grate has to be raked completely to pieces and resolved into its original elements of several bars and some other pieces of very resonant iron.

Naturally lunch was late. You knew it would be, and Jane was very sorry but she had forgotten to order the cream. After lunch there was an awful row with the baby. He was left alone while nurse went down to get some drinking water, and he fell off his chair—there has to be some one always on

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the spot with children. You can't turn your back a minute, etc.

Probably the doctor called at teatime and asked why you were up, and it is improbable in the extreme that he took in one word of your lucid explanation of the facts. He would tell you, if you asked him, that women make difficulties, and that he himself once had a week in bed and that everything went on just as usual. But then doctors don't mind the room not being "done," and their daily work doesn't behave like a sucking-kid after its mother. It stays where it is until its master comes to fetch it, and if it isn't done, well then, it just isn't, and that's all about it.

CHAPTER VI : THE "WHAT THE DEVIL ?" CLUB

"**I**T wouldn't be a bad plan, dear," Mrs. Henry once said sarcastically to her husband, "if you were to start a 'What the devil?' club ; you use the expression so frequently." The club was never founded, of course, but it wouldn't have been at all a bad plan. It would tend to clear the mind. For instance, say that at breakfast the eggs were a little underdone. If instead of exclaiming, "What the devil has cook been about ?" you reflect, "What the devil does it matter whether these eggs stick together in the shell or pour over the edge ? The fact that the eggs are there, and are more or less edible is enough for me," just think of the different complexion it would put on the whole affair. But in fact it wouldn't do, because different people have such different ideas about what they describe as "the things that matter." The last time

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"WHAT THE DEVIL?" CLUB

I called on Mrs. Henry she seemed very pleased about having had this idea of the club, and was quite excited at having used the word "devil." She had a brother staying with her at the time, and I think it was partly his robust influence that made her break out and be so racy.

"Henry's perfectly right, Maria, though he doesn't know it," said this brother. "There must be at least fifty occasions a day for saying 'What the devil?' in your house."

"Whatever do you mean, William?" said Mrs. Henry indulgently. He is her favourite brother.

"I'll show you as we go along," he answered, "I dare say the opportunities will turn up."

"I can't believe that France will go to war," observed Mrs. Henry a little later.

"What the devil does that matter?" replied William. "I beg your pardon, Maria, but it was your own idea. You see it is really

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of no consequence whether you believe it or not ; it won't alter the fact."

"Oh, of course, if you look at it like that, William," said Mrs. Henry a little huffily, "it doesn't matter what you believe. You might apply your theory to anything."

William said calmly, "It doesn't matter, except that your beliefs affect your character ; they don't affect facts."

"In that case, I suppose you wouldn't have sided with Mr. Sprigger who used to be curate here. He left the Church of England because he couldn't bring himself to believe the story of John the Baptist and the locusts. He had had a medical training to begin with, as he thought of being a doctor, and he was convinced that some particular part of the locust—I forget which it was exactly—would have been absolutely impossible to digest."

"There you are !" said William. "Either John digested those locusts or he didn't. You can't possibly alter the fact anyhow, and thinking about them was bad

“WHAT THE DEVIL?” CLUB

for Mr. Sprigger, because it got him into the habit of taking a lawyer's view of life ; arguing for the argument's sake.”

“I don't understand what you mean,” said Mrs. Henry coldly.

“Well, a lawyer will argue that a man is guilty or not guilty, whichever way he is paid to, won't he?” said William. “He doesn't want to get at the facts ; indeed, he refuses to be told sometimes for fear the knowledge should bias his mind. Now Sprigger can't get at his facts, which is the same as if he wouldn't, and so he can only be arguing for argument's sake, and he will never develop his soul in that way.”

“Mr. William,” I was moved to suggest later, “if I put my foot through that picture you have been working at this morning, would you say, ‘what the devil did it matter?’”

“No, certainly not, because it would matter.”

“Of course it would be very annoying,”

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said Mrs. Henry, "but I can't see, myself, that it would matter more than that Mr. Sprigger's beliefs should be undermined. You talk about facts, but Henry said only the other day, that your pictures were misrepresentations of fact."

"Did he?" said William. "I'll have to talk that over with him when he comes in. Anyhow, I don't see what the devil it matters what Henry or anybody else thinks about my pictures so long as they don't put their feet through them. They are definite creations—facts."

"Henry says not," she insisted. Henry came in just then and they began all over again.

"Well, now, about babies——" William was still pursuing his argument when we went in to dinner.

"Dear me, William," said Mrs. Henry tightly. William waved her aside with his knife. "Now I think, for my part," he said in loud, burly tones, "that it doesn't matter who the father is——"

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“You needn’t wait, Janet, we’ll ring,” said Mrs. Henry.

William paid the girl the graceful compliment of waiting until the door closed behind her, and then added, “So long as the thing is a fact, it doesn’t matter a hang how it became so. The question is, there’s a baby ; that’s all that is of interest to us, isn’t it, so long as it is strong and well ?”

“Henry, dear, do you care for more beetroot ?” said his wife, and then there was silence.

“Then there’s another silly thing you women do to confound issues and obscure points,” continued William. “When some one comes to the place—some poor girl newly married—and you are asked to call on her, the first thing you ask is, ‘And—er—who *was* she ?’ Now what the devil does it matter who she was ? Who *is* she ? you might perhaps ask if you want to know, though it is not of much importance. All you want to find out, to my thinking, is just this : *is* she, or is she *not* ?”

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“Is she, or is she not *what*, William?” his sister asked almost impatiently. “I don’t follow you.”

“Good Lord! is she *what*! That’s just it. Is she *anything*, my dear girl; is she anything with human blood, and bones, and a presentable face in front of it, or is she simply a mass of slowly decaying matter, endowed with the gift of moving from one chair to another? That’s the very thing I want to know.”

“What girl in particular were you speaking of, William?” said Mrs. Henry with forced patience. “If I know to whom you refer, perhaps I shall be able to tell you whether she is—what did you say? decaying? or not. Cheese, Henry?”

We were destined to see a good deal of William. He was trying to run some scheme or other in the neighbourhood, and he went into rooms for a time. He was asked out a good deal at first, but not so much later on. To me he became a sort of Eulenspiegel, and I delighted to hear of his

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progress in the town. But I believe that was not the light in which he regarded himself; he quite intended to be a serious reformer. One good thing he did; he stimulated industry in the neighbourhood. Ladies almost invariably took up a piece of knitting or work of some kind when he came near them, and men would go off to their studies, saying, “I’ll leave you to have a chat with my wife while I just finish a bit of work.” It interested him more than anything to find out what were the various landmarks in their past lives to which other people attached importance. There were some, he discovered, who thought that what they called “sound principles” were of importance, and when he pressed them to describe by what process a principle became sound, they nearly always said that it was sound if the best men held it. It took him many an hour’s hard work running the old ladies of Millport to ground on the point who the best men were. They dodged and doubled, burrowed and soared, fluttering,

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on to fences, which gave way under them when they sat for a moment to take breath. They took sanctuary in all sorts of funny little temples, which they had built, from time to time, of precepts gathered here and there. I remember seeing Mrs. Beehive flee, breathless, into one of these, and remain for a long time, while William stood, so to speak, baying at the door. It was the temple of "Woman being a good influence over man."

"Now, seriously," I heard William say, "do you think that you are a good influence for your husband to have about him? Remember, he is a very shrewd man, and knows what he is about."

Mrs. Beehive for the moment completely filled the temple, she swelled so much as she replied, "I hope, indeed, that I am, Mr.—er—"

"Why? in what way?" demanded deep-throated William.

"It is not for me to describe in what way," answered Mrs. Beehive, "but there

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are many ways. Perhaps you will find out some day for yourself when you are married!" she added, artfully drawing another bolt across the door.

He went round to the back of the temple and shouted through the window, "Isn't it more

likely that the influence of the Almighty keeps your husband friendly with you, rather than that your influence keeps him friendly with the Almighty? Not of course that it matters either way; the result is the same. He is a good honest man. But it is worth getting at the facts."

"Wait till you are married," repeated Mrs. Beehive shrilly, and I have no doubt that soon he had her fluttering before him once more, but I was obliged to leave them.



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“What the devil do these people think they are doing, leading the moral tone of the town?” he once said to Mrs. Henry. “Women who don’t understand the rudiments of morality.”

“Well, I am sure the men are no better, William,” said poor Mrs. Henry, who, as I have said, really admires her brother, and would like her sex to stand well with him.

“They are better in this way,” observed William, “that they treat their own morals as what they are, manners suitable and appropriate to the society in which they live; they don’t take them seriously as you do, as if they were ordained by Divine inspiration.”

“Do you mean to say that Henry, for instance, is not in earnest in the things which he believes to be right?” said Mrs. Henry, indignant at last. “Really, William, I can’t make you out at all.”

“Henry’s all right,” said William, “leave him out of it. What I mean is that when I see that woman, Beehive, for instance——”

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"Oh, William, do be careful. I feel sure they can hear in the pantry——"

"That woman, Beehive, I repeat," pursued William, "walking about and pretending that she knows for certain that it is wrong for other people to keep later hours and to use more varied language than she herself cares to do, I feel that I must somehow compel her to look at the facts, and to justify the high moral position she has usurped, before I can allow her to remain seated there unchallenged."

William's progress through the town was as easily marked as that of a tornado. I could always track him by a glance at the faces of people in the streets. Where he had passed there would inevitably be one or more injured-looking persons, readjusting their expressions and muttering indignantly to themselves.



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Sometimes a knot of women would be seen gibbering at a street corner, their individual disorders gathering them together by a natural process like that which goes to form an abscess. And when Mrs. Beehive was so far off as to be scarcely visible to the naked eye, I could tell by the angle at which she rolled whether or no she had fallen in with William.

Dear William and his facts were most enjoyable when taken together with Henry's quiet visions, and when Mrs. Beehive crossed the field of their united activities there was indeed a rare sight. For William, in his relentless pursuit of Mrs. Beehive's fallacies, had overlooked one most important fact, that so fast as you disperse matter in one direction it gathers together again in another. Henry was a persevering visionary, and no sooner had William scattered Mrs. Beehive to the four winds, than Henry built her up again, so that in the end one was forced to the conclusion that the poor lady had no independent existence at all.

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When Henry expressed his belief in any of her assertions, she swelled larger than any frog ; and when William ran at her in order to get at the facts, she crumbled to pieces like any other act of faith. The marvel is that William himself lived with a vitality independent of facts, and no "getting at the facts" had any destructive power over Henry. But that, as William explained when it was pointed out to him, was just as it should be. "There is better stuff in me," he assured us, "than the mere fact of my existence, and the fact about Henry is that he is a good man. You can't do away with that."

Mrs. Beehive overheard this unintelligible remark, and immediately, I believe, put on more weight.

CHAPTER VII : THE MYSTERIOUS MUNCHERS

SURELY there is something in Shakespeare about somebody who "munched and munched and munched." If so, it is there because Shakespeare had to do with theatres and evidently knew. When you look at all the pansy-faces together, munching, munching, munching, you begin to wonder why it is that persons who normally go for at least two hours at a time without food require so much extra nourishment all of a sudden. Sarah Jane, we know, gets through a morning's hard work with no other encouragement than a cup of inky tea at eleven. Miss Simmons, the typist, does not, surely, tick away at all that important stuff with her cheeks bulging like a monkey's over a hidden store of refreshment. In the showroom you never hear such an apology as, "Sorriv, Moddum, the young lady's sweetmeat is unusually sticky for the

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time of year ; she will answer your question in one moment." Therefore it cannot be that they eat because listening to the play is hard work and they need support.

Can it be to cause anæmia of the brain by directing the flow of blood to — etc. ? But then why desire to cause anæmia ?

They do not look as if their brains were in a fatally active condition ; in fact, no one in the audience ever looks quite right in the head. But, indeed, I have a theory that people are no longer themselves when they enter a theatre. Otherwise how is it possible to account for the fact that all our friends go constantly to the play and we go there ourselves, and yet we never, never meet one another ; at least hardly ever ? Isn't it a bewildering surprise to recognize a friend



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between the acts ? It seems to take at least five minutes peering and goggling before it is possible to believe the glad thing. And then what a waving and commotion ! “ The Prenderbursts ! Just fancy ! In the third row but two—yes, quite sure—that’s Effie ! just turning round now—behind the lady with the orange scarf.” Personally I go in just any old thing, because I never expect to be recognized ; and I hate leaving my seat, because I generally have on an evening top and thick boots, and it looks so bad if you go out and the lights are up.

Being, like all idle people, an intolerable wonderer, I have wondered for years “ who the people are who go to the theatre.” One thing is quite certain, and that is that the people who go are not the same as the people who have been. Every day one knocks against the people who have been, but the people who go one has never seen before—except at the theatre—and will never see again until the next time we go. Where they live between the perform-

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ances is a mystery. My own belief is that they disappear into their holes in the town, and there sleep until the next performance ; they eat at the theatre, as we have seen. As soon as you get a hypothesis started the whole thing begins to work out together, and all sorts of details arrange themselves. The only doubtful point now is how far the theatre managers are in the secret as regards the origin of their audiences, or whether they suppose them to be ordinary persons.

According to my hypothesis the munchers are a race of people apart, like the troglodytes, with physiological and social laws of their own, of which we know nothing. They are unknown to the police because they look more or less like human beings and behave quietly. They come to the box-office and book seats like you and I do, and the man in the box is in a hurry and doesn't notice any difference. But it is owing to their numbers that you and I can never get just the seats we want.

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The most curious thing about the whole business is the munchers' power of turning human beings into fairy changelings. It is owing to this power that we hardly ever meet our friends at the theatre. An instance that absolutely proves this theory occurred the other day, and it at once threw light on what has been an irritating mystery to me for years. The Blots were dining with us, and some one mentioned a play then running at our principal theatre.

"Oh, were you there?" said Amy Blot, "so were we. Where were you sitting? We never saw you."

"Second row of the dress circle," I answered, "fourth from the end."

"But so were we," protested Amy, "at least we were sixth from the end—on the right facing the stage." That had certainly been our side. "Oh, well, it's too queer," Amy decided. She is a very striking-looking woman; you couldn't mistake her; and her husband is really remarkably fat; you would pick him out at once. I thought it over for

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a few minutes, and then said quite definitely, "My dear Amy, you must be wrong, because I remember exactly who were in those seats. There was a girl with her hair parted on one side ; it looked very well in front, but it was scrabbly at the back, as if it had been eaten by rats. She had on a pink silk blouse of the new shape, but beyond that I couldn't see. There was an old lady with her, who had loose cheeks and a small cap with a butterfly in it—your husband wasn't dressed up in any way, was he ?"

"How absurd," said Amy, "of course not. But those were our seats, and we never saw you either. There were two minxes and two pasty-faced young men where you say you were."

I remember that I wrote to Sir Oliver Lodge about it that evening, but tore up the letter on my husband's advice, as he thought the matter might get taken up, and we should have men calling with notebooks. It wouldn't have done. But, all the same, this is probably what poor Shakespeare

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meant when he wrote about the lady who munched and munched and munched.

Looked at from the point of view of psychical research, munchers are extremely interesting. Any natives with horrible ways are all right if viewed scientifically. Munchers have many offensive habits which one might be inclined to resent were it not that it is nice to know how different we are. For instance, this sort of thing. You may be sitting enraptured, the tears streaming down your face, and the hobgoblin behind you starts her reminiscences :

“Something the same sort of story as Hindle Wakes, isn’t it, Lizzie ? ”

“Yes, did you see that ? ”

“My word, yes ! A funny sort of story, wasn’t it, didn’t you think ? ”

“Yes, do you remember where she comes on in the first act ? Something the same sort of thing, wasn’t it ? ”

“Were you ever at Blackpool ? ”

“Oh yes—hush ; look at him—there now—pity he don’t move up a bit sharper—

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we were at Blackpool a week, and mother, she——” etc.

The munchers have almost nerveless fingers, and drop their possessions a good deal. “I wonder if you’d mind, one moment——?” is the sort of thing they ask just when some climax or other is being reached. “I’ve dropped my hat under your seat.” When the wretch by your side has dropped an umbrella, and the two at the back have dropped a purse and a spectacle case, and have put a muff down your neck, and got some beads entangled in your hair; when eighteen of them have squeezed over you during each interval in order to reach seats that are next the gangway on the other side; when the one who looks like a debilitated porpoise has clapped his hands down your ear for ten minutes, and succeeded in recalling the singer whom you were so glad to get rid of; and when laughter, which is about as harmless and irritating as eggs shot from a cannon, has at last died away into mere sniggering at some homely detail in a

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tragedy : then, if you still feel cross, you must try to divert yourself with the mystery



of the munchers, and remember that one of your dearest friends may be sitting next to you, disguised by the spell. The debilitated porpoise

may be your friend De Vere, whose manners are so perfect, whose social sense is so developed that we none of us know what clods we are when we go to tea with him. It is only afterwards that we realize our deficiencies : when the Prenderbursts come to tea and we want to make our party feel like De Vere's. And he may think he was sitting next to a lemon-coloured lady with an angry face and a box of chocolates.

Now and again, of course, one sees an acquaintance or two, but they are nearly

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always rather dry and emphatic people, who have evidently escaped the power of the spell. You see them standing up, peering through glasses, and saying how odd it is that there seems to be no one here. When they read this they will say that they have not the least idea what it is all about.

Music seems to have some power of disenchantment, because at a concert, though the munchers fill a good part of the building, there are always dozens and dozens of people whom one knows. It may be that the awful weariness paralyses the hypnotic power of the munchers. They are there just the same, with their vacant faces, and their queer screws of hair, and their unsuitable clothes, but they are almost too weak to chew from their packets of refreshment. In fact, no one chews at a concert, except surreptitiously in a box.

There is a special subdivision of munchers who frequent the boxes both in theatres and at concerts. They are like the queen bees in the hive of theatre-goers. They are

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monstrously fat, female, and innocently foolish. Instead of having a pinched and wispy appearance, they are like the plump, precocious, affected, happy-looking children who perform on the music-hall stage. It is possible that the inferior munchers rear and keep these immense females to decorate the boxes, feeding them luxuriously at all hours, while they themselves subsist on their timid feasts of chocolate that tastes of hair oil.



The right attitude for the box can, surely, only be acquired by special culture and constant practice. To begin with there must always be a huge white arm with a podgy little hand on the

end of it draped along the edge of the box. The gigantic body, squeezed like blancmange into

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whatever mould the latest fashion dictates, is turned towards the stage. The round, good-natured face, with its natural vulgarity breaking through the assumed air of the Princess of Many Sorrows (imagine a jolly country butcher's wife in a tableau as "Our Lady of Pain"), is directed down and towards the auditorium at the angle of a turnip about to fall from a shelf. Bless the dears! It is a treat to see anyone so happy. But that is what the munchers are, depend upon it.

CHAPTER VIII : SHEER TEMPER

JUSTICE and Generosity are often supposed to be a pair of excellent friends who have an influence for good on one another's character. But Generosity has a still closer friend whom she says nothing about, namely Injustice. She cannot always behave as freely as she would like when Justice is there, explaining things and being so absolutely right. But when Injustice has been to tea with her, talking his bad, unscrupulous talk, making everything so gay, and putting the blame on all the wrong people, then Generosity has a free hand and can be as lavish as she likes.

"Come in here for a minute," said Reginald to Percy one morning in the City, "I want to get this hat ironed."

There was some delay, and Reginald was both clear and original in what he said. Percy was lost in admiration. The shop-

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man, expert in silence, by long practice, forbore to reply except by deprecating sounds which but served to inspire Reginald to a richer eloquence. At last the hat was brought in, ironed to perfection. Reginald finished his sentence, which glowed with the imaginative splendour of a Turner sunset.

“Oh, we never make any charge, sir, for ironing a hat,” said the expertly silent shopman.

“I don’t agree with you,” said Percy, removing from his coat the little tufts of hair which his friend had flung about in his careless agony. “You had the ball at your toe ; then was the time to express a large, generous forgiveness for the unconscionable delay.”

Unless we are unpleasant sort of people we cannot be generous about an injury unless we have first been mollified to some extent ; and what more mollifying than to find that the supposed injury has never been

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done? Percy saw this more clearly than Reginald, who was quite morbid about wanting to be in the right, always.

It is an interesting question what stupid persons find to get in a temper about, because, if you come to think of it, there is nothing in the world except stupidity (our own or other people's) to make anyone fractious, and, of course, stupid people cannot mind or they wouldn't be stupid. Good, just people may be angered by the wilful wickedness of some one who is determined not to do the thing required; but anger is not temper. Temper, that horrible itching and pain in one's social sense, can only be brought on by stupidity, real or imagined, in other people (I count inanimate objects such as shirt studs and hair as people because they can be just as irritating). Consider for a moment the persons who cause temper in a household; husbands, wives, children, and servants. Wives and servants, on an average, probably cause more temper because, on an average,

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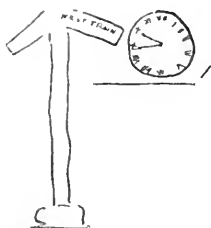
they are stupider than husbands and children. Relations are apt to be very thick-headed—perhaps because blood is thicker than water—almost as bad as tradesmen at the telephone. Friends are practically never stupid, while acquaintances often reach the extreme limit of what it is possible to bear. Compared to relations, who, as we have said, are as bad as tradesmen at the telephone, acquaintances are as bad as the half-witted boy who is usually left in charge of the station-master's office.

Talking of station-masters, and *à propos* of wives being stupider than husbands, I feel absolutely certain that no station-master has ever spent such a day as would be inevitable for him if he were a wife, and his staff were nice, hardworking girls.

Imagine a platform full of people waiting for the 9.45 express to Holyhead. "Oh no, m'm," says the female station-master's second-in-command, with a silly smile, "the 9.45 hasn't come up yet. I expect it'll be just coming now. I've sent to tell the

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engine-driver that you're waiting, and she says that she was a bit late this morning, as they hadn't brought the coal." She observes the infuriated passengers and beams upon



them with her mouth open. "It is a pity, isn't it, keeping them waiting! They do seem upset! Just fancy! What a shame!!" (It will be such a help to every one connected

with this book if all the capable ladies who run their houses to perfection will just begin to skip here, and not say anything more about it; because we know the other side of the question quite well, and the whole thing is hardly serious enough for argument.) When the matter of the 9.45 has been sifted to the bottom, it is found that the coal was only an excuse; the engine-driver really hadn't an idea of the time. She was just

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washing out a few handkerchiefs in the waiting-room, where the old lady in charge never noticed her doing it ; she thought she had come about the windows.

Or, again, what would happen if a man of business told his clerk to telephone for a hundredweight of grey blotting-paper, and while he wrote at his desk he had to endure this sort of thing

(as we do when we ask our maids to send a telephone message) : “ Is that Hoggins’s? I say, is that Hoggins’s? *Hoggins*. Aren’t you a stationer? Beppardon?—yes, a stationer—oh, well, we want a hundredweight of



blotting-paper at once, please. Beppardon? This is Mr. Beadle’s. Beadle and Sons—J. J. Beadle and Sons—will you send it at once,

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please. Beppardon ? Beadle and Sons—Oh yes, I'm sorry—I thought you knew—44 Dacre Street—Dacre Street—No, not Baker—Dacre. [The man of business growls from his desk, “You didn't tell him *grey* blotting-paper.”] What's that ? Beppardon ? Yes, Dacre Street. A hundredweight of blotting-paper at once. [The man of business intervenes again, gnashing his teeth, “*Grey* blotting-paper.”] Beppardon ? Pink or white ? Oh, either, thank you—yes, please. Good morning. [Rings off.] Beppardon, sir ? Did you speak ? ”

That is the sort of occasion when Generosity does not care to hear what Justice has to say. If an angel came down from heaven and unjustly beat the offending clerk, the man of business would find it easy to say, “Poor fellow, he was doing his best,” and to give him half a crown for a new hat.

If all the efficient females will sit down quite quietly we will add what we were about to say, that men are just as irritating, but they don't mean so inexcusably well.

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Take, for instance, the man at an inquiry office ; he doesn't mean well. "I want a ticket to Leamington," you say. He gives you a first-class ticket, and you remonstrate. "You didn't say which you wanted," he retorts, getting impudent at once. "You never asked," is your very natural reply.

Or, take a conjurer or magic-lantern man. You say, "I want you to be very careful, please, not to do anything to frighten the children. There will be some quite little ones, and they don't like anything at all alarming." "Oh, we understand children perfectly, Madam," he says, "I know exactly the sort of thing you require."

The first picture that he puts on the screen is of a child awakened from its sleep by an enormous beetle with coloured eyes and a walking-stick. When the commotion and the screaming are over, the smaller children are brought back and sit sobbing on their nurses' knees, somewhere near the door. The proceedings are a trifle damped, but the babies promise, with a catch in their voices,

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to be very good as they know it is funny. The next picture shows a happy family party at breakfast. There enters a policeman, who by carrying papa away to prison leaves the family in tears, and the breakfast spilled on the cloth. The arrest is found to be a humorous mistake, and papa is brought home after a painful scene in the prison, but the story proves beyond a doubt that no one is safe, even in their own nursery with both parents present. Here, however, our argument seems to break down, because it is probable that the man meant well.

But in the upper classes take, for instance, Reginald himself. He is sometimes appallingly dense, and can be very intelligently tiresome. He lived, until quite lately, with three unmarried sisters, and sometimes when he came home it happened that none of them had been out, and all were eagerly sociable.

"Well, dear, what's the news?" Louisa might ask.

"Oh, nothing," Reginald would reply.

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“I thought that cook said she had seen posters about a railway accident,” said Agnes.

“Possibly,” replied Reginald, “there may have been.”

“Didn’t you see anything about it?” asked Theresa wistfully.

“It was all in the paper I got coming home—— [Chorus : “Where, oh, where is it?”] Sorry, I left it in the train,” said Reginald, and then he would go off to dress. Or the same thing might happen the other way round. Louisa had been out to tea on Saturday afternoon, and seen the paper at a friend’s house. Reginald had been playing golf and was lying half asleep in his chair.

“Such an awful thing has happened,” announced Louisa, very properly, the moment she came in.

“Oh,” said Reginald.

“A frightful railway accident; four killed, and sixteen taken to the hospital.”

“Who are the four?” Reginald inquired,

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putting his bottom leg on the top one and knocking out his pipe.

“Oh, no one we know; but just think!” I actually heard all this one afternoon, and it is perfectly true that Reginald replied in the following way:

“At least four people whom you don’t know die every day, anyhow, so to-day is no worse than yesterday.”

Really, it is impossible to know whether they do it on purpose or not; especially Reginald, who is supposed to be clever. However, it all just shows that it is stupidity that makes one get in a temper. There is often nothing to get angry about, but the whole thing gets on one’s nerves. But there is worse to come. So far we have only touched the fringe of what is bad for the temper. We will now visit a land of torture, parts of which are, I believe, untrodden by the male sex.

Has any man ever had to defend his own self—his ego—call it anything you like, from the pursuing eye of a friend? Has he

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ever been obliged to draw a veil over the process of his living and say politely, "Excuse me, my ego I think?" It has become the custom for people to go about in society more or less clothed, and we get to know our friends fairly well, even when thus attired; indeed, it is unusual to insist on a complete deshabelle before we can enjoy a pleasant chat. But it would be very tiresome if we were obliged to cover up our face and hands with a mask and thick gloves because our friends insisted on examining the pores of our skin through a magnifying glass. Some women habitually treat those whom they love to such a dreadful moral scrutiny. Men don't do it to each other. Has any man ever gone to his work and been met by a fellow labourer who gazed into his eyes and said in a voice that seemed to lift his spinal cord and search beneath it, "You are looking tired to-day."

Now that is a remark which, except it be made in the most casual and perfunctory manner, is intolerable from any one but a

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member of the opposite sex, with whom we are passionately in love. Women seldom understand that it is not enough that they love the person whom they examine in this way. The victim must be deeply in love with his tormentor before he can bear it, and even then it is a risk. For of course the rash loveress, emboldened by silence, goes on to ask, "What's the matter?" and it happens that the Beloved is wearing boots of which he is immoderately anxious to be rid, the loveress is almost bound to be the victim of Injustice before she obtains anything from Generosity.

All personal remarks are to imaginative persons a heavy strain on endurance. Their imagination at once conjures up a loathly picture of themselves in the circumstances suggested by the remark. It also mentally fits the remark with an answer, and another offensive picture results. For instance, there is the question, "Are you very tired?" The imagined answer, in a tone to fit the question, is, "Yes, dear, very." Plop!

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You immediately see yourself as a great, fat, loose body dropping into an arm-chair. You see a luscious smile spread over your imagined face as the kindly solicitous one unlaces your boots—you feel mushy all over. “Damn !” is probably your ungracious reply as you hurriedly put the mask over your normally apparent fatigue. “What the deuce should I be tired for? You’re tired yourself—I’ll take your boots off.” So you divert attention from the anxious scrutiny of commonplace blemishes which in tactful circles “we don’t notice.” Then you feel a brute, and you get in a temper at having been made to feel a brute when you were not really one at all ; and you were already in a temper before, because you had seen an incorrect vision of yourself as a juicy fool. And yet there was nothing in any of it to get in a temper about. There are scores of harmless remarks that have this irritating, personal effect. “Is your head very bad?” is a ticklish question for anybody but one’s old nurse to take upon themselves. It is not often that

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there are more than three people in the world who may ask it. You see, the only possible answer, "Yes, very," is so silly. What a thing to be asked to say! The next move on the part of the dear enemy can only be, "Would you like anything for it?" and what on earth could one like for it that one has not already done of one's own accord? Even if we haven't put on a wet handkerchief with eau-de-Cologne it is unthinkable to have any but one of the possible three persons fiddling with wet things about our head. Our forehead would, to a certainty, be shiny and the hair pushed the wrong way. The wretch would probably smooth back the curls behind our ears, and we should know what a hideous fright we looked and that they loved us just as well like that—No, three people is too many. No one but our nurse who was there from the very first can be suffered to deface our beauty and not know what they have done.

All sensible people will have abandoned this chapter long ago, so I may as well

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finish it for the morbid delectation of the neurotic, or for those perfectly sane, yet kind-hearted sufferers, who have not yet dared to speak of their sorrows, even to themselves. Let us collect some other impossible, searching remarks and leave them to soak in without comment. "My darling's eyes look heavy to-day"—(if you are not very careful the adjective may quite well be "puffy")—"perhaps you have eaten something that has disagreed with you." I had to write this in a great hurry for fear I thought about it and began to get furious again.

"You must tell me when you are tired of me, and I'll go."

Murder is too good for the inquisitress who subjects one to this last torture; and yet she sins in the name of Love, and we dare not complain for fear of angering the god, who employs the weak-minded as



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often as not. I never heard one man say to another, "Your beard has lost its pretty colour since you were ill. I wonder if you tried vaseline—" or, "I can't bear to see you wear those trousers ; they are too loose on the hips ; they make you look quite stout. You don't mind my saying so, do you?" This would entail a searching finger through the beard or a playful pinch on the hips. No, men don't do it. They have to bear it sometimes, but they don't do it. Decidedly the fringe of aggravation is male and female in fairly equal proportion ; but when you get to the very heart of it, you will find a lady sitting there as sure as fate. And it is only after you have been thoroughly unjust that you can begin to lavish affection on her with a generous hand.

CHAPTER IX : THE ROYAL VISIT

IT was first rumoured and then announced in the papers. By and by the full programme of events was published, and then invitations to this and that were issued. There was nothing unseemly about the Millport manœuvres before the great battle of Exclusive Rights. No one admitted that there had been, was, or would be any demand for invitations to anything ; not even for the big garden-party where the King and Queen were to be present. There was a semi-private luncheon too, but that was a sacramental feast. No one spoke of it beforehand, any more than a duke would rush into his club, shouting, "I say ! I'm going to get the Garter—are you ?" No. One read about it in the paper next morning ; that was all. But there was a wider choice of behaviour with regard to the other invitations. People behaved like the animals

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in the Ark, each one after his kind. The sort who are at their best early in the morning, and are therefore unpopular with liverish hosts, were in great spirits about the whole thing. They applied early for tickets for everything. The appointed day lay before them as a rosy picnic. But this was not the attitude of quite the best people. They did all their spade-work by moonlight, when the busy revellers were in bed, dreaming happy dreams, with medallions of their Majesties put out with the clean shirts for the morning. But in those dark hours the county families worked for promotion like heroes, appearing next day spruce and unconcerned as usual, with the suggestion, "Shall you be going to the garden-party? We might drive out together— Oh, haven't you? How extraordinary! These things are frightfully badly managed. I expect they haven't got half the invitations out yet; ours only came last week." In the case of those whose midnight labours had been unblessed with cardboard fruit the

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formula was a little different. There was no pretending that the fruit was unpalatable and had been rejected. Millport is not so crude as all that. The formula was to the effect that invitations were being issued on a purely official basis, and mismanaged at that, and that there would be an awfully queer crowd there. How would they behave?

Reginald was on the committee of the hospital which the King and Queen were to visit, so, of course, Polly would be provided with a good place. One thing was quite clear, that the occasion asked for, if it did not actually demand, a new dress.

“My dearest life,” said Reginald, “to begin with, the Queen is short-sighted, and to go on with, you will be hidden by abler and stouter persons than yourself in the front row.”

Polly argued that there would be the tea afterwards, and, besides, anyhow——Reginald gave her a cheque at once, because when women begin saying, “besides, any-

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how," it is far wiser to give in. Such words never preface the truth, and the business of hearing what follows is generally very long and tedious. Polly had an almost new afternoon dress which, had it been a success, she would have worn ; but it was not altogether right, and Mrs. Henry, whose husband was also on the committee, had been in the shop when she bought it, and would remember its age. Also she had since been given a hat which was not quite right with the dress. It would need all a woman's life as a context to show up trifles like these so that they would figure as reasons before a husband's mind. Therefore, we invent reasons which look solid, rather than bring forward the nebulous truth which would probably be met with contempt.

"I want a dress for the King's visit, Miss Price," said Polly, standing next day in a small room at the top of a dingy little house. Miss Price, very minute, very wizened, very commanding, stood beside a round table on which were a vase of artificial flowers,

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several photographs of worn, though cheerful, faces, and some fashion papers of remote date.

“I am afraid I shan’t be able to manage it, Mrs.—er—” she said, “I am so rushed already, I can hardly get through the orders I have.” Polly took no notice of this. “Are you making for a lot of people?” she asked with deep interest.

“There’s Mrs. Beehive,” began Miss Price. “She’s ordered a very nice dress.”

“Oh, has she?” said Polly, “what fun! I shall look out for it. Is it very new?”

“Well, no,” Miss Price said hesitatingly, “the new styles would hardly suit Mrs. Beehive. She is all shapes and sizes, you would think, according to the weather.”

Polly sopped this up like nectar, and retailed it to Reginald when she got home. “Great Scot!” he said, “I hope Beehive doesn’t go and look over my waistcoats at the tailor’s, and ask the fitter how much he has let out since last year. What curious creatures you are.”

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"It's all right," said Polly, "I love to know beforehand what people are going to wear, and then I know what to avoid."

"But I think you told me that Miss Price said she couldn't make it?" said Reginald.

"Oh, that is just a little nervous habit of hers," Polly assured him, "like nice-mannered people wanting to be pressed to a second helping. Would you believe it if your tailor said he hadn't time to make you a new coat?"

"I never heard of any tailor saying such a thing," Reginald replied.

"No, of course not," retorted Polly contemptuously, "because you order your clothes in March, and they come home the year after next. I might undertake to make you a pair of boots if I could wait to deliver them until after you were dead. And I don't suppose you ever complain, do you?"

"Oh yes," said Reginald. "Haven't you seen boys tearing along the Exchange with large cardboard boxes under their arms? If you got on to the Flags you would find the

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place littered with tissue paper, and Beehive, and Henry and I trying on each other's trousers. That means that we complained of the delay and sent a boy to fetch the things at once."

One rather sad feature of the traffic that went on in Miss Price's dingy apartments was the immense pains which were taken by all the ladies to find out what was the very last word in fashion, and so attire themselves for the delight of their Sovereigns. Little did they suspect that a creation from the Rue de la Paix will avail a woman at the gates of Buckingham Palace no more than a pair of blue corsets will soften the heart of Peter. In both cases the facts would very likely be used against her. The desire to please nearly always contains elements of pathos.



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The programme of the great day's proceedings was dull enough reading. It not only left one with a strong belief in the divine right of kings, but also suggested that Providence went a step further and provided rulers who, though human in many respects, were fashioned of immortally tough material. We read about the woman's heart beneath the queenly robe, of the home life of monarchs, and the birthday festivals of princes. The papers assure us that the King frequently expresses regret at the loss of his collar-stud, and that the Queen enjoys a chat with her intimate friends. Anecdotes are related of how an emperor once remarked to a gamekeeper whom he met traversing the park, "I expect you find plenty to do towards the middle of August," and how the wife of a reigning Sovereign entered the cottage of an old woman and observed with a smile, "I see you have been peeling onions; you must remember not to cut your husband's bread with the same knife." All these

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incidents show, beyond any doubt, that the same heart beats alike for rich and poor. But there is one heaven-sent quality which distinguishes rulers from the common herd, and that is an insensibility to boredom and the pangs of platitude which transcends all mortal endowments. Human nature has the power to endure ; the higher and royal nature, I hope and believe, does not mind.

How much the Imperial pair observed of all the labour which had been expended for their pleasure it is impossible to say. Whether it ever struck her Majesty that Polly's sleeves were cut from a more exclusive design than Mrs. Henry's, or whether she was startled by Mrs. Beehive's superior knowledge of the habits of the Court, no one will ever know. But probably the fact that all sorts of hidden details had been attended to with enthusiasm by every one, that a spider on the roof of the hospital had been dislodged from his perch, that the chairman had given extra attention to the parting of what hair he possessed, that the matron had

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on her last new underbodice, and that the address which was to be delivered by the Recorder had been carefully prepared: all these trifles, if unrecognized separately, must

yet have combined to express a general sense of happiness and welcome.

The morning of the great day dawned gloomy and cold, the first wet day there had been for three weeks. A chilly north-west wind brought, alternately, pene-

trating fine rain and short intervals of greeny-grey sky, through which the sun peeped without interest. On the first moment of these intervals macintoshes and umbrellas were eagerly put aside, the enthusiasts lining the streets emerging gay as a rainbow, until the fretful clouds gathered once more,



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and everybody with one voice exclaimed, "Dear me! What a pity!"

Inside the hospital there had been very little sleep for anybody. It would be interesting to know whether persons marooned on a desert island, with the whole day before them, begin to get in a hurry when the time comes to dish up what frugal meals are available—say, two bananas and a sweet biscuit. It is certain that the importance and extent of preparations to be made for an occasion have no bearing on the amount of time needed to complete them. There will be a scurry at the end, whether the occasion is the beanfeasting of a thousand people, or the getting off of one man and his papers for an early train. Whether we allow half an hour for the one (and make the beanfeast impromptu), or whether we prepare for the other six months beforehand (reminding him every hour that the time is getting on, and finally ourselves putting the tobacco-pouch in his pocket), the result will be the same; the thing will get done with equal

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hurry and impatience. Everything had been quite ready the day before this visit of the King and Queen ; yet no one in the hospital went to bed, except the patients, who were in bed already, and they got very little sleep. The visit, which it was reckoned would take half an hour, was timed for eleven, and by nine o'clock the invalids were all washed and had ribbons in their hair ; the wards were spotlessly tidy, and such windows as were to be occupied by guests were already nearly filled. There was to be a short reception in the hall when their Majesties arrived, and a few people were to be presented.

. . . .

When the moment was over, and the royal couple had passed on their way through the wards ; when they had been ushered past the fluttering windows ; when they had re-entered their carriage, and disappeared, methodically bowing, along the glittering, bobbing, trotting, waving, cheer-

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ing vista, which is to most of us the whole life of our King and Queen, then, happy and relieved, we returned to the official tea downstairs, and resumed our several natures.

CHAPTER X : FIDELITY

“**I** WISH that people wouldn’t write these ridiculous letters,” said Polly, laying aside a bundle of about eight closely written sheets. “It’s Octavia Sinclair. She says she is quite sure that I have forgotten her. I have not forgotten her in the least, only she doesn’t fill the whole of my landscape ; it is so absurd that people should want to.”

“It is almost barbaric to want a landscape to remain the same always,” I agreed. “One runs up villa residences everywhere now, of course, and the place looks different ; but the old earth is the same underneath, if people would only have the sense to understand.”

“Do you think I run up lots of villa residences ?” Polly asked wistfully.

“I was trying to help you, dear, not to criticize,” I replied.

“You see,” Polly explained, “if you are

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making anything, no matter what, the pieces you are making it with don't all stay in the same place. When the world was being made it would have been dreadful if all the mountains and countries had been made in succession and just stuck down one in front of the other, and if each tree and each animal had stayed where it was——”

“My dearest Polly,” I begged, “stop just one minute. You don't see trees as men, walking, do you?”

“If you are going to be like the serious raconteur's comic brother in the pantomime, I'll stop,” she answered. “You must either follow me or stay at home. I see, in my mind's eye, the Almighty evolving a perpetually changing order out of the chaos that occurs every day. You don't make a world out of a hill, and then a tree, and then an ocean, stuck down like salt-cellars on the table. The sea is being made into rain to wash the ground into different shapes: the trees settle down into coal, or we cut them up to build things with, and

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we clear the ground for villa residences to hold the new people whom Providence sends. Sometimes there is an earthquake which throws up the dead whom we have forgotten and swallows up the living. It is all like a kaleidoscope making different patterns of the same bits."

The door opened and Reginald looked in, decided that the moment was not for him, shrugged his shoulders, and went out.

"You can't play a game with every one staying in the same place," resumed Polly. "You can't embroider if you don't use first one thread and then another; you can't paint a picture without adding new colours to the old ones; you can't make music with one note; you can't——"

"I've got that point, dear," I said. "You can go on. You can't make a hotel a lively place with only one guest. Yes?"

"I am not talking of enjoyment," said Polly, "but of any work of construction. I am constructing my life, and even though I were a hermit (so you may dispose of your

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vulgarity about hotels and villas) I could still add new experiences to the old without being accused of infidelity."

"But suppose you repented of your past experiences?" I suggested.

"I shouldn't wish them undone," said Polly calmly. "I should merely see them in a new light, and they would fall back into their place in the background of my life's pattern."

"Poor experiences! Alas! Octavia, my poor friend!" I murmured.

"I feel the same thing about men," said Polly; "they are in the pattern too. Sex is merely a matter of colour in the threads."

"Which is what colour?" I asked.

"They are both all colours," she said; "that is why they make such a good picture together."

"Well, what do you mean by saying that it is the same with men?" I asked. "What is the same?"

"I mean that it takes a great many men to make one husband, just as it takes a great

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many Octavia Sinclairs to make one person's life," she explained.

"How many husbands have you besides Reginald?" I asked with some hesitation.

"It is very difficult to be patient with you, Martha," replied Polly. "I have only one husband, as you know, but he is compounded of all the men I ever met. When I meet a man who is bad-tempered, I weave the thread of his ill-temper beside that of Reginald's amazing patience, and you can't imagine how Reginald's colours glow. When I meet another who admires what Reginald calls my waffle-headedness (which he dislikes, by the way), I enjoy a perfect orgy of waffle-headedness, and use it all up before Reginald comes back, and then he restores the balance on the other side, and there, again, we have proportion, which is the art of life. I know several men whose trousers are either perfectly creased or not folded at all, and between them I realize that Reginald's are the nearest to the ideal trouser, showing thought for the temple of his spirit

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without the exaggerated anxieties of you, for instance, Martha. Wasn't there some poet who spoke of 'the need of a world of men for me'? The lady whom he mentioned there had lost her husband or her lover, or whoever he was, and she felt, I suppose, that it would take several men to replace him. Now I have not lost mine, and his beauty is immensely enhanced by the qualities of all the rest of his sex. As for embracing and that kind of thing, that is quite beside the mark. I dare say that if we were all in the garden of Eden I might occasionally salute the marbled brow of one or two of the most perfect, just to emphasize some point in what I was saying, or as the expression of some passing emotion; but the thing has got to mean so much more than Nature intended, that one doesn't do it, and it is no special deprivation to me to do without."

"And suppose the threads of your pattern get restive," I asked, "and won't stay in their proper positions. Are you never con-

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fronted with a blazing flower of the tropics when you were at work on a daisy?"

"No," she replied quite seriously; "but if I were, of course I should work it in somehow."

"Does Reginald embroider on the same plan?" I asked after a pause.

"I expect not," she answered; "because I don't think that men are so wrapped up in themselves as we are—I don't mean fond of themselves, I mean wrapped up. And another thing. I never think that there is

much substance in my mind except what other people put in—and that, I admit, I develop very nicely—but Reginald has stuff of his own which he spins out of his inner consciousness, and which takes shape when it encounters facts. I don't know whether that is the difference between other men and women, but I have an idea that if Moses



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had been a woman he would have come back from the wilderness rather bereft of ideas, and not having done any useful thinking at all. Perhaps his (or her) mind would have 'turned on itself,' as they say, and he (or she) would have been at loggerheads with all the fowls of the air. 'There was a most impertinent vulture,' the female Moses would have told the children of Israel, 'who made a point of settling down first on whichever rock I had arranged to sit on. Of course if I had been a man he wouldn't have dared. It has taken me forty years of intense thought to dodge him, but I believe I could manage it now if I went back.'"

"But Moses had no society, either, to help his great thoughts to take shape," I said pettishly; "and when he did get back he was a kill-joy, and finally died of temper."

"Well, my dear," said Polly, "you find taking two children to the seaside quite as much as you can manage. I don't know,

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I'm sure, what you would say to forty thousand, or whatever the number was whom Moses took. If you got through as well as he did you'd be lucky. And remember, he had to keep them amused for more than a month."



Polly is like that ; it is impossible to take any of her arguments to a logical conclusion.

I tried to make her see that Reginald was very forbearing to find all his ideals of womanhood in her without seeking outside inspiration, and she said that "men were like that"; they had no ideals, and were prepared to take just anything and muddle along with it provided it fulfilled some of its purposes. "Have you ever watched them shopping?" she asked; "they never turn out a whole shop as we do.

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They say, vaguely looking round, 'Is this all you have?' and the girl, of course, grins and says, 'Yes, it is the very best, and the other kinds are never asked for now'; and he says, 'Oh, very well then, just send it up, will you, please,' and he pays far too much for it. Now we, even when we have bought a thing, often see something else that would have done far better, and then we fret over it, or take steps to alter it. That is idealism."

"Oh, Polly!" I remonstrated. "You make my head ache so. Do you mean that men are never discontented with their wives? And, besides, you said yourself that all the other men you saw only made you admire Reginald the more."

"Martha, Martha," said Polly, reprov-
ingly. "You have that worst type of mind—
if it can be called a mind—that labours a
point until it breaks. Everything that I
have said to you is perfectly true, but if you
pick the whole of it to pieces you will find
that none of the bits match, and that none

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of them are alike on both sides. Character study is not a science—it is an art ; and you have to keep one eye closed very often while you work.”

“ Anyhow,” I said, “ to return to the original subject, Octavia Sinclair. What are you going to say to her ? ”

“ Tell her not to be an ass,” said Polly.

“ Is that your best way of making her understand that you ‘ love her still the same ? ’ ” I inquired.

“ Well, I don’t love her the same when she is an ass,” said Polly. “ She was a duck when I loved her first. I tell her not to be an ass, because I can’t love her under that disguise. When she stops being an ass she will become a duck again—at least, I hope so—and if she is the same duck I shall find a nice pond for her in my heart ; not necessarily the same pond, because that may be filled up by now—I forget—but one quite as good as the old, if not better. And if she has any sense, she will get out of it sometimes and walk about on the grass by herself.”

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“I shall go home and write a chapter on ‘Fidelity,’” I warned her.

“It is not fidelity to your friends to put them into books,” she said severely.

“It is not worse than putting them into embroidery-frames,” I answered snappishly, “and then luring them into that monster hotel of yours, where you even forget their numbers, and don’t answer their bells.”

“Never mind, don’t let’s quarrel,” said Polly. “You repeat in your book what I say to you in confidence——”

“Not at all,” I assured her; “I am merely assimilating other people’s ideas in the elegant way you described just now as being the habit of women, and when they emerge again you won’t know your own. They will have taken life in an entirely original shape. I can’t spin new stuff out of nothing, as you say your husband does——”

The door opened, and the parlour-maid announced, “Mrs. Beehive and Mrs. Henry.”

CHAPTER XI : THE RETURN OF THE BRIDE

POLLY had invited several of us to meet a young bride. Mrs. Henry said that when her brother William heard of the party he said at once, "Of course you won't go until you know *who she was*." His sister assured him that it was a matter of indifference to us who the girl was ; we all knew her husband, and that would speak for her.

"I don't believe that was the end of Mr. William." This was the little bait I offered her, and it landed a beauty.

"The end of William !" she exclaimed ; "not a bit of it. He said that if the girl was a nonentity to begin with, marrying Mr. Spicer wouldn't galvanize her into anything worthy of the name of life ; and that if she was anybody before she married, the fact that we knew Mr. Spicer wouldn't alter the shape of her immortal soul. And

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what do you think he said after that ? ” she added rather breathlessly.

“ What ? ” we asked all together, with round eyes.

“ That we were evidently going to meet to-day in the spirit of vultures on the track of food, and that if the girl happens to be rather dead stuff we shall probably like her better than if she is a frisky lamb ! ”

Mrs. Beehive confessed that she “ didn’t quite follow his idea.” Polly, who was looking out of the window, remarked, “ Mr. William would make the world an awful place if he had his way. Imagine the menus he would write ! Your talking about carrion—well, you said something very like it—reminded me.—

“ Soup. Odds and ends off people’s plates.

“ Fish. Brill. Not absolutely fresh. Has fallen once on to the pavement and innumerable times on to the floor of the shop before it got here.

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“Cutlets. (Then there would be a short history of the lives of the lamb and the butcher who killed it—very unfavourable to the butcher.)

“Pudding. Batter made of eggs a week old, margarine, milk (chock-full of germs), flour— Oh, here she comes.”

We were talking like monkeys when the bride was announced. She was small and pale and pretty. We gave her tea, and then invited her to unbosom herself, which she did.

“Do you find it awfully dull when your husband goes down town in the morning?” she asked.

We looked at one another, and Mrs. Beehive, who is never at a loss, replied pompously, “No, I can’t say I have ever felt dull for a moment; not even when I was first married. I was always a great house-keeper, and attended to everything myself; and after I had paid the books and been to give my orders at the shops, the morning seemed to have flown.”

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“Oh dear !” said the poor bride. Polly made a comforting little muddle with the cups and winked at me.

“And in the afternoons, of course, there were social duties,” continued good Mrs. Beehive. “My husband and I were, I think I may say, exceedingly popular, even in the early days.”

“Oh dear !” sighed the bride again, “but this is the first social duty I have had at all yet.”

“Well, don’t bear it unaided,” I said ; “do let us help you if we can.”

“You don’t care for fancy work, do you ?” asked Polly.

“No,” the poor girl said dolefully. “You see, I never had time for it at home. I used to ride and go out with my brothers a good deal, and there were always people straying in to talk.”

“But what about your cook ?” I suggested. “I find that she fills my day so completely that I have no time to think, or to paint in water-colours.”

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“My cook!” she said with astonishment. “Why, there are only ten minutes in the day when I am allowed to see her.”

“Now, look here,” I said; “you must learn this sooner or later, and we are all among friends—that is a ruse of hers, like an ogre pretending that he is out district-visiting all day, and that the little girls he brings home are orphans whom he is taking care of. She just does that to get your confidence. Then, by and by, she’ll begin inviting you down for a minute or two at a time——”

“Why, she did ask me to come down and look at the tomatoes to-day, just before I came out,” reflected the bride.

“That’s it!” I exclaimed, slapping my plate triumphantly. “To-day it was the tomatoes, to-morrow it will be the sausage-skewers: there will be one missing, and she will wish you to see for yourself, so that there can be no misunderstanding later on. The next day it will be two things: to smell the rabbits in the morning, and see

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whether you—a young, inexperienced child—think it wise to cook them——”

“But, my dear,” interrupted Mrs. Beehive, “surely there is no harm in that, and Mrs. Spicer would prefer to make sure.”

“Do you know how a rabbit ought to smell?” I asked the bride, in fairness, “because I don’t know to this day. It all seems to me equally uninviting.”

“I didn’t know they ought to smell at all,” the girl murmured.

“You’ve a lot to learn,” I said kindly. “Anyhow—rabbits in the morning, and in the afternoon, say, perhaps, that it is early closing day and she had forgotten that you would want butter.”

“Then what does one do?”

“Ah, that is what cook says that she prefers you should decide,” I concluded happily. “You won’t find the time heavy on your hands for very long, especially if anything turns up that you want to do.”

“Thank you very much indeed,” she

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said gratefully ; “ it is so good of you to tell me these things.”

“ Is there anything else that troubles you ? ” asked Polly, holding out a piece of cake.

“ No, I don’t think so—” the bride hesitated, and then, after a moment’s pause, threw this at us : “ I suppose there isn’t really very much that one *can* have for breakfast, is there ? ”

“ Just the bacon,” I remarked ; “ that is always as nice as anything.”

“ Oh dear me,” said Mrs. Beehive, “ surely we have got beyond those days when it was ‘ bacon and eggs, eggs and bacon,’ every morning. The Americans have done so much for us there : all sorts of tempting little hot dishes can be made—and fruit ; you should give your husband fruit, it is so good for him.”

“ Paul won’t eat fruit,” said the bride.

“ Well, then, try him with some light, vegetarian dishes,” said Mrs. Beehive, now quite in her element. “ *Onions farcies,*

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tomatoes and cheese, ramikins of prawns, soufflés of liver, réchauffés of marrow on a hard-boiled egg, with soubise sauce——”

“Well, you see,” the perplexed little dear objected, “cook doesn’t come down much before half-past seven, and we breakfast at eight sharp, because Paul——”

“Make her,” Mrs. Beehive interposed, rolling her kid gloves into a hard ball.

“How big is your cook in her stockinged feet?” asked Polly.

“Oh, she is quite a little thing,” answered the innocent bride, “quite young, and very pleasant. But I couldn’t exactly go and fork her out of bed, could I? I shouldn’t like to.”

“Give her orders,” said Mrs. Beehive firmly, “and if she doesn’t obey them dismiss her.”



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“No, no,” Polly and I almost shouted in the same breath, as we each laid a hand on an outlying knee of the bride. “Don’t do that! Never change anything but yourself,” said Polly. “Remember, dear, it is like the sun revolving round the earth—things are not what they seem. Never sack your cook, never leave your tradespeople,



never be disillusioned in your friends, never divorce your husband. All the others you could get instead would be just the same, fixed and immovable like the sun. You

can only shift yourself and look at them from another side——” Polly was quite breathless.

“Only the sun does move,” I said gloomily, “carrying us with it. ‘Soon will

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cook and I be lying each within our narrow bed,' thank heaven !”

“You are letting your spirits run away with you, Martha,” said Mrs. Beehive, “and you are not helping Mrs.—er—at all.”

“But, then, aren't all wives alike, too?” asked the bride, who had evidently been swallowing Polly's metaphors whole, and feeling very uncomfortable.

“Certainly they are,” replied Polly ; “at least they are all the same as each other, but they are never the same as themselves for long. But all the people, men, cooks, etc., whom we have to handle can be depended on to a certainty. That is why I suggest that any shifting which has to be done shall be done by ourselves if we want to be comfortable.”

“You are not a suffragette, are you?” the bride asked in alarm. “Paul can't bear them.”

“Oh dear no,” said Polly airily. “If my dear Sisters in the Cook became a governing body they would be lost to me, because they would become part of the solid mass

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of things which you and I have to handle and walk round. It's no good mixing or changing governing bodies. They'll go on governing away just the same, and as fast as they do away with one thing another will crop up. Some one has to stay outside and see to things. Have some more tea?"

"And what about all the evil in the world?" demanded the round-eyed bride, "Paul says——"

"My husband takes a very peculiar view," interrupted Mrs. Henry, who had not had her fair share by any means; we all felt that and made way. "He says that the evil arises—it is really very naughty of him—from our first parents having been driven out of Eden before they had had time to get enough apples. That if we were to know good and evil anyhow, we ought to know enough about it. I think he means that we are all being as clever as we are able, but that there is not enough intelligence in the world to cope with the demand: so he just does the best he can. But he talks a great

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deal of nonsense, of course, and doesn't mean half he says."

"I wish that Paul had a profession that would make him work at home," the bride said presently. "If he were a clergyman, now, or an artist, just think how nice it would be!"

"My dear, you don't know what you are saying," Mrs. Henry assured her. "My husband works at home, and there are times when I would pay anyone any sum to take him away, and let him join the Morris Dancers, or anything that would take him into the open air."

"Really!" said the bride. "But can't you take him out yourself if he needs exercise?"

Mrs. Henry snorted. "It is not that I care whether he needs exercise or not," she said, "but I should be thankful to have the house to myself sometimes. If I so much as start the sewing-machine in the room over his head, he comes out like an animal from its den, and says he can't think of a word with that noise going on. Or if Bella is

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turning out the room either above or below him, he complains that she is throwing rocks about, and he can't keep his papers on the



table. If we clean the passage outside his room, and the carpet-sweeper happens to touch his door once, he flies out in a rage; and I can't talk to anyone in the drawing-room without his hearing. Then either he wants his meals taken to the study, or else he comes down and

won't let the children speak; and he slops the gravy all about, and wants the meal hurried through so that he can begin to smoke—and I do draw the line at smoking at meals, don't you, Mrs.—er—?”

“Oh no,” said the amiable little bride, “my husband might fill all the dishes with smoke if he liked, and I would turn out the

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rooms myself if only he would stay at home ; but it is so dull being alone."

"Well, my dear," said Polly, "if there were a way to preserve your present superfluous loneliness in water-glass or screw-topped bottles, I'd buy it off you with pleasure, or, better still, make you keep it to use later. You'll want it."

"We are dining out to-night for the first time," said the bride, cheering up at the prospect ; "and then, perhaps, I shall get to know a few people." We felt that it would be only right to take the top off this dream as well, and to show her the realities which lay beneath. "Oh, I expect you'll have plenty of callers by and by," said Mrs. Beehive. ("The better to see you, my dear," I added in my mind, remembering Red Riding Hood.)

"Don't pour out all your soul on the carpet after dinner, there's a dear," said kindly Polly.

"What do you mean ? " the victim asked, beginning to get frightened.

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“Well,” I suggested, “if anyone asks you whether you have early tea in the morning, and whether your husband finds that he can manage with four clean shirts a week, put them off with some excuse——”

Polly broke in earnestly, “And don’t let out any little theories you may have formed about living or anything, and don’t answer when they ask if this was your first offer of marriage, and——”

“And,” I interrupted across her, “don’t say if you like games, or you will be placarded as a champion hockey-player. Don’t admit that you can read, write, cipher, walk, ride, drive, see, hear, taste, smell, get in a temper, or play on any instrument, or that you ever wash, eat, sleep, cry, laugh, or thread a needle. Admit nothing, deny nothing, express no hopes or fears, acknowledge no creed. There is only one subject on God’s earth which you can broach without danger to your reputation, and that is the weather. If you find yourself being led into an expression of opinion about

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anything, throw the evil thing from you and take up the weather where you left it—and may heaven defend you.”

“One more thing,” said Polly; “and mind what I say, or you’ll regret it. If anyone offers you a footstool or a cushion behind your back, kick it away and sit up, whatever you feel like.”

“But I do very often feel tired,” said the bride.

“Never mind,” replied Polly, with inexorable breeziness, “sit up; lock the gates; put your tongue out. If the rabble once gets into your heart, they’ll sack the place and use everything in it to your disadvantage.”

Mrs. Henry was tying her veil and thinking about something else, but Mrs. Beehive looked, somehow, as if she had eaten too much. The little bride hurriedly looked at the clock and exclaimed: “Oh how late! Paul will be back; I must fly! Thank you a thousand times for all your kindness and advice. I can’t believe all you

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said just now, but I expect you didn't mean it, did you ? ”

She wrung our hands and disappeared. Mrs. Beehive and Mrs. Henry summoned a taxi and drove off together.

“ Why were you so frank, Polly ? ” I asked when we were alone. “ I am always pleased to back you up, but do you think it is any good ? ”

“ Of course not,” said Polly ; “ I should have bitten my tongue out if it were. But, anyway, we shan't have it on our consciences that we didn't warn her.”

CHAPTER XII : JUST THE USUAL

IF there is anything more remarkable than the way in which everything in the world is constantly changing, it is how everything goes on just as usual ; just as it has gone on for centuries and centuries. That perpetual business of the toilet dates from the Fall. Sundays have always come round in due course. I expect that the family dinner-table, that uncouth institution, has been going on a long time. Domestic friction occurs in the first pages of Genesis. Who was the first monthly nurse ? She probably dates pretty far back. And the only part of the show which we are definitely assured will be done away with is the only bit of it which has any real permanent interest—marrying and giving in marriage. On that showing we may have to face the endless routine of getting up, washing, eating, talking, and going to bed again with

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all the flavour that there is in any of it—gone! It will be worse than being in a nunnery, because there will be nothing to renounce. So long as one knows that the world, the flesh, and the devil (which are for each sex concentrated in the other) are only separated from us by our own will it is all right ; but not to have them prowling about outside within reach, should we change our minds, is unthinkable. It will be just like an everlasting party of pew-openers, for they are the only people I can think of who have no sex. Another curious thing is that Creation—Nature—whatever you like to call her—manages to vary her show continually, while the lords of creation, who are supposed to be better equipped with intelligence, cannot for the life of them think of any new way of doing the same old thing. In Nature the same ideas are repeated, without appearing to be the same. Quite old-fashioned customs like sunrise and sunset, the seasons, the weather, recur as usual, but they are not often mono-

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tonous : except in exaggerated places like the Poles or the Equator, where it goes on being dark or light for too long at a time, or only rains once a year, or where the snow doesn't know when to stop. But these exceptions are just faults. They don't show the utter lack of resource displayed by the mass of human beings. Think what it means to pass our little span of time in a world where one may ask on any Sunday, "What is there for dinner?" and be told, "Just the usual!" And the usual is the absolutely usual; it is not like the setting of the sun, which goes on as usual, but with differences enough to make the performance always surprising. There is no difference whatever between the beef of one Sunday and that of the next; every bubble on the Yorkshire pudding is in its appointed place—even the burned side is the same—and the tart or pudding (it is immaterial which) is so identical with last Sunday's that no thinking mind can seriously reject the doctrine of immortality.

"What fruit have you to-day, Mrs.

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Globe?" you may ask the greengrocer's wife on Monday.

"Well, m'm, there's not very much to-day, except the apples; they're very nice;

two-pence-halfpenny the pound." And yet the shop looks full of fruit. But when you come to look at it closely, it is like the egg



in "Alice in Wonderland," which receded from every shelf to the one above it. The other fruit doesn't actually melt away under one's gaze, but it becomes impossible to obtain. It is either a pine-apple at seven-and-sixpence (very nice, but quite out of the question), or nice English grapes (which you can't make into a serviceable pudding for a family), or some outlandish fruit, two-pence each (which, of course, wouldn't do),

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or else the oranges, which we are rather tired of ; and besides, they are going off now and are not recommended.

There are some days when I believe all the food in the shops is made of painted cardboard like a doll's-house dinner-party, because, although there appears to be an endless variety, there is, in fact, nothing that can be bought and eaten by ordinary people. If you examine each item separately, this will become evident. All the things in the windows are frauds, for the reasons described in Mrs. Globe's shop, and therefore there is nothing for it but to have just the usual ; to return up the street again to the butcher. We always "fall back" on his bloated, striped perpetuity.

"What about a nice fowl?" asks some bright spirit, and, indeed, that is true ; what about it? except that, even supposing you can afford to spend three-and-sixpence on a quarter-of-an-hour's amusement for four persons, there is not really any difference between this fowl and the last we had, so we

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may as well fall back on the butcher, who gives more for the same price. The fishmonger has all sorts of delightful traveller's samples in the way of foreign birds hanging over the front of his shop, but, if you look into them, they are all plain fowls at heart; and when you get the two-and-sixpenny ones home and undress them, really it would come cheaper and be just as satisfactory to pot a sparrow out of the bath-room window with a catapult. By the way, I wonder that is not done oftener. It would be a change from the neck of mutton, and until they become "just the usual" sparrows, and find their way to the poulterers, we shall not be told that they are very scarce and not in season.

Perhaps the reason why many of us behave so much as usual is that, although there are many varieties of conduct available, we have got into a nervous habit of eliminating most of them from our list of what is possible, just as we reject many eatables which the shops would provide. But in either case it is not actually necessary to fall back on the

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apples or the butcher or the nice thing to say. There is plenty of variety to be had if people would stop falling back on the "old favourites" either in food or conversation. The dullest permanent officials and ladies in the world have thoughts about what is going on, if they would only allow themselves to think them : thoughts as peculiar to themselves, as different from their neighbours', as are the curves made by two lambs jumping in the air. But they won't tell us what these thoughts are. They push them away, saying to themselves, "No, that would never do," and so they fall back on the apples. That is to say, they dish up the same old remarks in the same old way, until those of us who feel boredom begin to scream and cry and throw the food about. It is dreadful. I have seen people sitting round a table deliberately, wantonly refusing us the thoughts which the good God put into their heads in order that that they might share them with us. Some funny fellow on reading this will discover that it would be

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capital sport if we all said what we thought. He will picture insults flying like bullets, and all decency at an end. But no one is suggesting that the usual topics of conversation should be changed unless with the consent of all present. All we require is that when the scenery of Dorsetshire or the marriage of one's son or the book which every one is reading is under discussion, the company should not limit their conversation to what it is "always as nice as anything" to say ; that they should not give us "just the usual," but try some of the other things in the shop, in season and out of season, as we have been taught. The price, of course, may be a little higher ; but though some will call us vulgar if we do not fall back on the apples, others will call us dull if we do, so what does it matter ? No one, however careful, can be a perfect lady to the whole world. So when Mrs. Beehive asks us what we feel about the scenery of Dorsetshire, let us be as open with her as we should be with

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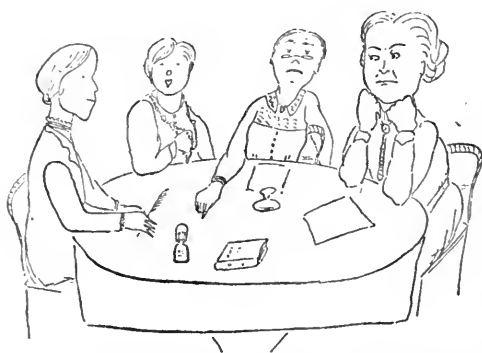
our doctor if he suddenly lost his temper, thumped his fist on the table, and, looking us straight between the eyes, thundered, "Damn it all, madam, what have you had for breakfast?" We should tell the truth at once then, without stopping to think whether we had not better leave out the fifth cup of tea. It is just the fifth cup of tea that may be the significant note in an otherwise commonplace breakfast. It is sickeningly dull hearing you tell us, not what you noticed about the scenery of Dorsetshire, but what you decided years ago that it was a nice thing to think about the scenery of any county. The apples were all right in their place, but why fall back on them?

I once had a cook who greeted me every morning with the same remark, "There's nothing left but just the spinach." She pronounced it "spinack," which made the offence worse, and she referred to the fact that we had eaten all the other vegetables in our twice-a-weekly hamper from the country.

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Conversation among careful people has, as a rule, very little left in it besides "just the spinack." I mentioned this to Polly one day, and she said at once, without a moment's reflection : "I have just had a luncheon-party, and there is nothing left of me but just the spinack, I can tell you. Another quarter of an hour and I should have fallen back on the apples."

"I thought your party was delightful," said Mrs. Spicer, who happened to be present.



"Of course it was," said Polly, "because I gave you the best I had. It wasn't much compared to the intellectual treat you

might have had if I happened to be one of the Great Spirits of the Age, but it was all I had in the box ; it wasn't 'just the spinack.' I kept nothing from you."

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“But—” Mrs. Spicer seemed about to raise an objection, and hesitated.

“Yes?” said Polly; “don’t hover round your mind, please, rejecting things; we’re not tied to the apples.”

“You said yourself,” Mrs. Spicer reminded her boldly, “that you advised me never to say what I thought about anything—that it was not safe—that the weather was the only possible subject of conversation.”

“I never said that anything else was safe now, did I?” inquired Polly. “But you won’t make your parties a success if you go on the lines I indicated as safe. After all, what is life without risks?—especially in conversation.”

“But I don’t believe I could be interesting anyhow,” said Mrs. Spicer with a forlorn sigh. “I never can think of anything to say.”

“Then don’t say anything,” Polly advised, “and your silence will become so rich and meaty with thought (for every one, even a canary, thinks, there can be no doubt

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about that), that after a time, when you have quite lost the habit of thinking what to say, a moment may come when some slight emotion will unloose your tongue and it will speak for itself, and——”

“Polly, dear,” I warned her, “you will be so sorry when you have drawn the analogy between what Mrs. Spicer will say and Balaam’s ass ; it will be easier to stop now than to explain it away.”

Mrs. Spicer giggled. We know her pretty well now, and she doesn’t mind.

“I wish, Martha, that you would rely a little more on my judgment and less on my knowledge of Scripture,” said Polly. “I had quite forgotten the story you refer to. What was in my mind was a vision of what it would be like if the things we call ‘still life’ suddenly spoke and told us how the world looked to them. It would be a delightful change from hearing how it looks to clever men. As it is, we have no missing link between the unusual sincerity of some of us and the usual insincerity of the rest.

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What we want is the truth—the whole truth—about what people with faces like turbot and macaroons think. I should stay awake all night with the excitement of knowing Mrs. Beehive as her Maker knows her. Probably she could throw a great deal of light on all sorts of obvious things that complicated people, like Reginald, miss owing to being tangled up in their own intelligence.”

“By the way,” said Mrs. Spicer, “talking of food, isn’t it absurd how we keep on with the same dishes when the cookery books are full of different ways of cooking everything? But, somehow, if you look through the books, there are only about three things one can have, because the others either want ingredients that we haven’t got in the house, and that are not worth buying for once, or they have to be prepared the day before, or they use too many separate pans, and cook grumbles about the washing-up; but it does seem unenterprising, as you say.”

“Considering, my dear, that since the

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time of Noah, or thereabouts, we have been going on as usual and found it less trouble, it is not likely"—said Polly sententiously—"it is not likely, so far as I can judge by the look of you, that you will return our calls by moonlight, or go to church on a week-day, or tell me which of us you would rather ran away with Mr. Spicer——"

"But you don't do those sort of things yourself," protested Mrs. Spicer.

Polly said, "Excuse me a moment," and went to answer the telephone.

"I never knew Polly do anything actually unusual," I said to Mrs. Spicer, "but she seems to do the usual things because they have just occurred to her for the first time as a good thing to do ; not because there is nothing else she can do."

"Just fancy !" said Polly, coming back ; "Reginald says that the Henrys are dreadfully upset because their cook is going to marry the chauffeur, and she won't be able to stay on with them. It is just what always happens, isn't it ?"

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“Just the usual,” I agreed, “unless you care to go to the expense of a Morganatic alliance for the chauffeur.”

We all agreed that there was no other way out of it.

CHAPTER XIII : HOW NAUGHTY

THE deliberate pursuit of naughtiness may seem absurd to those who have a natural superfluity of it, but, all the same, it is much in vogue. And, as in other matters besides naughtiness, the amateurs who most wish to excel are those who are the least likely to do anything of the sort. Every one knows theoretically that possession is nine points of desire, that in love there is always *l'un qui baise et l'autre qui tend la joue*, but how many have realized that the Evil one is also human, and pursues those who shun him, while he turns a deaf ear to those who really long to be naughty. It is the nice, mousy dears whom he runs after with some brilliant new devilment in his pocket. When the young desperado or the middle-aged lady with nothing in particular to do runs up to him and exclaims, "Oh, Mr. Satan, do let us have some of

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your lovely, wicked suggestions !” he turns green, and says, “ Go away to a supper club. I will send my junior assistant to you there.” And off he flies to refresh himself at the nearest rectory.

Equally incomprehensible are certain other folk who, themselves incapable of any vice, set forth armed to the teeth against a spiritual enemy who knows them not ; just as innocent old ladies in silk mantles cling together at railway stations for fear of being abducted to San Francisco. Many sensitive young clergymen have been known to speak in an uncommonly plucky way about a hot bath as if it were a sporting enterprise ; showing no delicacy whatever on the subject, but attacking it as man to man, without any of that nonsensical reserve which, as they say, drives so many good people out of the Church. It is difficult to explain why boasting of having had a hot bath should imply a defensive attitude towards Satan ; but, in fact, these heroes seem to cry aloud, “ Parsons are not such

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old ladies as you think. I could ruffle it with the best of you dog foxes if I chose, and, as it is, a feller gets jolly hot sprintin' round the parish if he's not in good condition, I can tell you." When they behave in this wild fashion they are consciously playing with danger. Not exactly ringing Satan's front-door bell and then running away as one type of woman does, but rather showing how, properly armed, one may walk through his domains and take no harm. But suppose that after coming down from the heights of the life apart, and proclaiming himself an ordinary person, he should discover that he may walk in "the flesh" all day and be as safe as if he were in the Albert Hall. If it is "influence" that he wants, shall we suggest that man's respect is more easily roused by something different from himself than by a half-baked imitation ; that non-churchgoers are not really surprised into admiration by learning that a clergyman washes more than his hands ; and that a sailor who is already intimate

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with the reckless elements will not believe more readily in God because His exponent has been seen to gather up his petticoats and play football or to take a hand at whist? In fact, if details of the toilet are to come into it at all, a verminous hermit must seem almost more spiritually detached than a young gentleman who makes such a fuss about "boiling himself" after a game of tennis.

This dare-devil attitude has perhaps been adopted by some men who have taken to the profession of the Church partly because their natural inclination is towards a life so harmless that they might feel it to be not quite manly unless it were supposed to be compulsory. So they hide their mildness by eating a bun as if it were horseflesh, assuring the bad boys that their own tastes are extremely dashing, but that they have chosen to throw away the forbidden fruit and keep only the skin; to reject the germinating kernel and nibble the husks, which are really most enjoyable. The truth being

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that the fruit as the boys eat it would give our friends "with no nonsense about them" the most horrible indigestion. There are of course others who passionately loved the fruit and threw it away deliberately; but you never find them nibbling the husks, any more than Brutus would have had his son whom he sacrificed stuffed for a drawing-room ornament. It is quite one thing for a lion to find a baby in its path, and to refuse, from conscientious motives, to eat it, and another for a chicken to plume itself on having had such a jolly run after the cat without killing it.

We have referred, in passing, to the lady who rings Satan's front-door bell and then runs away. In considering what Miss Corelli has taught us to call the "Sorrows of Satan," even so small an annoyance as this very hackneyed trick must have its place. The ladies who practise it are those who make an appointment with a man whom they know to be in love with them, and then—turn up with a chaperon. They

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are the ladies who like their relatives to be respectable and their friends to be disreputable, so that they may have all the fun and none of the responsibility ; who devour all the indecent books they can get hold of during the week, and then go to church on Sunday ; who would run miles



to be introduced to a murderer at dinner, but would feel really hurt if their parlour-maid so much as cracked the commandment which comes next to the one about murder.

People of such various types, those who wheedle the Devil for no particular purpose, those who assume the defensive when the poor fellow wasn't looking at them, and those who call him down from his study to answer the bell and then make a bolt for

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sanctuary, are examples of a class whom the Evil one leaves to his subordinates.

A promising young assistant of his works, disguised as a waiter, at one of the supper clubs to which we have supposed the naughty ladies to be 'so contemptuously relegated. I caught his eye one night when he was cynically winding up the strands of coloured paper that are sometimes thrown about at the end of the proceedings. "Another evening wasted!" he exclaimed with uncontrollable displeasure, "They might be a lot of blooming anarchists for all the harm they've done to-night. And here am I, who have waited on the House of Commons from its earliest years, and put 'em up to all their best tricks, literally throwing myself away." He stopped to brush aside a yellowish tear. "Mr. Satan himself," he continued, "won't come down here at all; he says they're not worth it. Look at that there innocent mother of a family a-dancing the Tango! We'll never do any good with

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her, yet she likes to come here and waste my time a-calling for cigarettes. Look at her and her party now, Miss—turn your head so—now then you see? One of our clients is there, with the bald head, behind the pillar. We'd have had him anyhow, without the club, so it doesn't even pay us that way. Hair, did you say, Miss? No, the gentlemen with a good deal of hair aren't as a rule much good to us, and they encourage the women."

"Encourage them in what?" I asked.

"Toasting their toes at the mouth of hell, they thinks, Miss, though it's nothing of the kind really; it's just pestering Mr. Satan something awful."

"Then where does your real work lie?" I asked. "Where is hell?"

It was some moments before I could get an answer, as the noise suddenly became terrific. A negro at the piano had begun to play, accompanied by guitars, tambourines, and a howling chorus of tired-looking equatorials of some sort. Three or four

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scandalous old women, with transformations on their heads, and trophies from the bargain sales on their backs, were joylessly smoking and applauding in a frightful state of nerves. They looked fish-out-of-wool-shops, and my heart ached to pop them gently back behind the counter and draw down the



blinds while they had a little nap. My friend was very busy opening bottles of champagne. Presently he stood beside me once more, napkin on arm.

“What was that you asked me just now, Miss?” he said.

“I asked you where hell was,” I replied.

“Well, I couldn’t say exactly, Miss. Mr. Satan, like, he takes the interesting cases—very quiet folk mostly ; you’d hardly believe

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what a powerful lot of harm they do in a lifetime. A different lot altogether from these 'ere naughty cards, Miss. They ain't no manner of good to us."

He disappeared then, but I met him again later. He was still a waiter, brought in on the occasion of a small dinner-party in the suburbs of London. I thought he looked much happier, but I wondered what he found worth his attention in the present company. My host I knew to be an angel, scarcely disguised, as incorruptible as fire. The guests seemed nothing in particular. They left at the hour decreed by good taste ; we left an hour later. I had a moment's conversation in the hall with my friend, while my husband was saying his last " Well now, look here," over a drink.

" Who is it to-night ? " I said. " Do tell me before they come out."

" A gentleman as Mr. Satan has set his heart on, Miss," he replied, with a careful eye on the open door of the smoking-room. " Third on your left as you sat at dinner. [I

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remembered his face after we got home, a blue-eyed, nervous little father with a drooping moustache.] He's a gentleman in business, Miss, and would like to do right, I feel sure of that. That's why I've been sent. Fortunately for us his trade's a speculative one, in which it's easy to make suggestions. A little intelligence is all that's needed, and that, as a rule, they haven't got. Mr. Satan's a good deal interested in this case because of the gentleman's principles. He's been brought up with a great fear of anything like dishonesty. I'm afraid it's upsetting his health a good deal. Good night, Miss ; here they come. Your carriage up now, sir."

CHAPTER XIV : ELECTIONEERING

I TURNED the corner of the street in a tremendous hurry and ran into Reginald and Polly. They both looked as if they had had news of a death, although they did not actually show signs of grief. It was a peculiar look they had, half importance, half vexation. I stopped for a moment in surprise, and Polly said to her husband, "I think we shall want Martha, Reginald."

"Now, be careful," I said, a little shortly. "I have had almost enough of you two. If you want to have your photographs taken again you must go by yourselves. Polly ! [It was a dreadful idea, but quite likely.] You weren't going to ask me to help you to have the baby taken ?"

"Baby !" Polly said contemptuously. "It will be a long time before I think of having baby taken anywhere. I certainly

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won't take it round canvassing with a blue ribbon round its neck like those other dreadful people did."

"I have got to have an election, Martha," Reginald explained. "It is my turn to come out, and they are going to oppose me. It is nothing personal; they are fighting all they can this year all over the town."

"I forgot that you were on the City Council," I said.

"You wouldn't forget if you were me," observed Polly. "Here, come into this café and have tea, and we'll make things as clear as possible to you."

It was a large café, with a band, where you get the kind of tea that doesn't include bread-and-butter. You can get tea-cake that is like hot skin and oil, and you can put aniline raspberry jam on it, and follow it down with dandelion-coloured cake that has a suspicious flavour. But if you ask for bread-and-butter, the rather spent young person with the apron says, "Cut bread-and-butter, did you mean?" and makes it

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sound like a faddy temperance food. If you are brave enough to admit that you do mean cut bread-and-butter, she brings something thin and mottled like German sausage. But it was only for convenience that we turned in there ; it is not like criticizing Polly's tea.

" We have only got a week or two to do it in," said Reginald, " and there is a lot to do. The organization is not up to much."

" But look here," I said ; " I don't know anything at all about politics, and I can't argue, because I always agree with what anybody says ; it always seems so sensible until one thinks it over quietly at home."

" Well, common sense will teach you the main line of what you have got to drum into them," said Reginald. " You see, there are always no end of things that they want ' put down.' Very well, then. I am the man to put them down, whatever they are, because I have a good deal of time to give to the job, see ? Then there's the Church. There's Canon Black—you know the man I mean—

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they all know him, and he's very much liked. If he speaks for me, we'll get a lot of votes ; do you know him, by the way ? ”

“ No,” I said, “ I've never heard of him.”

“ Yes, you have,” Reginald corrected me, “ because I have just told you about him ; so you can say that you know he approves of me—he does, really—I'm not joking. Well then, you know, I haven't got any fads—temperance or such things—but if any one wants you to say that I'll support their fads, you must just use tact, and, if necessary, say I'll call. You write on the card—here, I'll show you.”

He pulled a card out of his pocket and showed it to me. It was a drab little article, with the mysteriously depressing influence which always accompanies a space for a name and address. Anything which emphasizes the fact that we are one of millions of similar works of the Almighty has the same dingy effect. To be one of numberless leaves on a tree is delightful enough, but to have a caterpillar come round with a note-book and

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enter, "Name of tree, number of branch, time of fall in preceding year," etc., gives an air of squalor to the whole tree. There was, unhappily for my peculiar talent, no space in which to record the appearance of the voter, but the canvasser was instructed to classify her victims as "Conservative," "Liberal," or "doubtful," and was encouraged, besides, to add such code signals of distress as "Mr. ——— call," "won't say," "dead," "at sea," "carriage on day of election," or anything else likely to be helpful in the committee-rooms.

For the benefit of those who have never canvassed, I here explain the spiritual meaning of these different signals. "Mr. ——— call" means that it is impossible for the candidate to blandish each of his four thousand or so of voters, so he reserves himself for the very good and the very bad, and those who are described in the jargon of the committee rooms as "the doubtful ones." But beware of the trap which underlies the fair word "doubtful"! There are no doubtful

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ones. People who express doubts on any subject are rarely concerned with the merits of the case on either side. All they are waiting for is something that will turn up to give a picturesque glow to whichever side their instinct favours; and they are seldom disappointed. Except in certain spots, where some common interest—like nationality or sectarianism, or the nature of their employment—makes a group of people definite and outspoken in their political feelings, it is remarkable what a lot of rate-payers one may fawn upon without being thrown off the door-step or welcomed with open arms. This alleged indecision is a pastime and a trap which the canvasser provides and falls into with unfailing regularity. The attitude of the voter is generally that of the tease among school-children. “Ticky, ticky, tack, which hand will you have?” he asks, and the coveted apple or vote shifts about with hardly a show of deception. Now and then they are secret, like a dog with a bone. “We have the

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benefit of the ballot," they say, with the most aggressive purity-in-politics face, all pursed up. But if no one came prying to find out where their sympathies were hidden, they would be the first to throw out hints of "hot and cold" to promote the game. The voters who throw the "benefit of the ballot" in our teeth are regular old chase-me-Charlies.

But it took me three cold, wet, weary, underfed weeks in October to discover all this. Reginald took his election very seriously ; so did his rival. Millport was shaken by the warfare of other excellent gentlemen in different parts of the town, and they were all serious. So far as one can see, it is only bad men who go into politics or administration with a light heart. Playful minds are so easily led astray. Reginald made all his canvassers take it seriously too. He put the fear of John Bull into them. Our faces grew long or wide with the timid earnestness of the perfect lady, convinced of the honesty of

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her commander. So did the faces of the Liberal candidate's assistants, only they were of a rather different build from ours—very nice, but bonier than ours as a rule ; and when we met them on the opposite side of the street, sometimes actually on the same door-step, they looked to me the sort of women who can carve a duck for eight people.

“ Will you take these cards, please, Mrs. Molyneux ? ” said a fat, cheery man at the committee rooms when I presented myself there for the first time. The room seemed full of men, strangely shaped like fancy breads ; some of them writing at a bare table ; all of them as active as dry leaves at that time of year.

“ You will,” continued the agent, shuffling the cards with the help of a moistened thumb, “ do these houses not marked with a tick. The rest have been done, but these were either not at home when our canvasser called, or there was some other reason why they have to be done again.”

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Reginald came in then, looking as if the fate of continents were secreted under his hat, and Polly arrived at the same moment. "Ah, Martha," Reginald said, with the smile of a clever actor playing a crisis in the Foreign Office, "that's good of you. You'd better take Polly and go round together. How are we getting on, Hoppes?" He leaned over the table in an absorbed attitude, so I left with my cards and Polly.

Christabel Street was a quiet little neighbourhood of yellow brick fronts, red stone steps, and brown doors, at the back of the main line of frowsy shops which ran across Reginald's ward. I found number 102, next door to an inquisitive young person with a pail of dirty water and a cold in the head. We knocked at the door. The name on the card was Eliza Wickham. It will probably save explanation if I add a picture of Eliza Wickham and Polly (I kept in the background to learn experience), and record the conversation exactly as it took place.

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ELIZA : "Is't for the votin' ? Well, 'oo is he ?"

POLLY : "Oh such a good man ! I expect you know all about him." (I asked her



afterwards why she did not explain that he was her husband, and she said she had done so in a great many cases, but found that it sometimes prejudiced them. They drew personal comparisons between her and the Liberal candidate's wife, who ran clubs and concerts in

that district.) "You know Canon Black ? Well, Mr. Ashfield knows him *very* well, and he has had so much experience on the School Board— Oh no, that is the Liberal candidate that you mean— No, he has had no experience at all. He couldn't reduce the rates by a penny because,

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you see, he doesn't know how to do it. Now, I am sure you will get your husband to vote for him ; a good-looking woman like you can always get round her husband, and we can call for him at any hour. Good-bye, and you'll say I called, won't you ? ”

“ What shall we mark her ? ” she asked, as we turned away.

“ She didn't give us much clue, did she ? ” I answered. “ She hardly said anything. But she had a very firm eye. Suppose we say ‘ doubtful. ’ ”

We came upon Mrs. Henry at the bottom of Christabel Street, and Polly took her away, sending me alone to Llewellyn Street, and promising to join me at the other end.

“ But surely John Hughes won't be in at this time, ” I protested, hoping for respite.

“ He may be a sailor or a policeman, ” said Polly ; “ you find them at all sorts of queer times. But mind : if he is in bed you must rout him out all the same ; he has been visited a great many times. ”

John Hughes, to my surprise and alarm,

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was on his door-step, smoking a pipe. I gathered together in my head all the directions that Reginald had given me, and we conversed as follows :



JOHN HUGHES :
“ Don't know anything about him. What's his views on this 'ere Irish business ? ”

ME (Aside :
“ Dash it ! Reginald never told me that ! ”) “ Oh, you had better ask him yourself. That is just the sort of question he delights in. Do you know Canon Black ? ”

JOHN HUGHES : “ Never heard of 'im.”

ME : “ Oh, well, I will send Mr. Ashfield to you. You are Conservative, aren't you ? ”

JOHN HUGHES : “ I'm not particular. I vote for the best man.”

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ME (eagerly) : “ Oh, he’s *far* the best. You see, he has done so much work before. But he will call on you, and then you will be able to hear everything he says.”

JOHN HUGHES : “ You needn’t trouble. They all talk alike. I’ll make inquiries, and if I find he’s the best man I’ll vote for him. . . . No, I don’t want no fetchin’ ; I can walk. And I’ll vote one way or the other. We ’ave the benefit of the ballot, you see.”

“ There is only one way to mark John Hughes,” I said to myself, as I retraced my steps, “ and that is ‘ WON’T SAY ! ’ ” I wrote it very distinctly and felt that I had done my duty.

I looked at my card and found a dozen names in Confucius Street, of which the only one unticked was that of Robert Taylor. But on Mr. Taylor’s door-step another of our canvassers was already waiting for admittance. I thought, at first, that she belonged to the opposite camp, but a second glance at her face and figure reassured me. “ Church

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school teacher," I said to myself, and waited patiently to go to her assistance if Mr. Taylor became restive, and, in any case, to enter the result of the interview on my card. Mr. Taylor was not at home, and my brave young lady did her best to gain the sympathy of his wife, who was a little chilly and preoccupied, I thought. The conversation, though delightfully friendly,

was almost one-sided.

"You know Canon Black, don't you? ("Ah," I thought, "she has got our trump card too, has she?") Mr. Ashfield knows him *very* well. He thinks so much of

him. . . . Yes, I quite agree with you, there's a great deal too much of it, and Mr. Ashfield is just the sort of man you want to put it



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down. He gives so much time to the work, too. ("I must remember always to put that in," I said to myself.) You have no idea the trouble he takes with it. . . . No, I don't think the other gentleman does; you see, he has hardly the time for it. That is why we are trying to get Mr. Ashfield in; just because of that. He is such a sound man and can give the time to it. Thank you very much. . . . Oh, we shall certainly get him in if they all help us as much as you!"

"What do you think?" I said to her, card in hand, "doubtful?"

"No," she replied brightly, her inextinguishable optimism shining through her glasses. "I think it will be better to say, 'Not at home, but probably Conservative.'"

One of the greatest blows to my pride was Clarissa Scholefield. I wound up with her before lunch, and it had to be a good lunch! No amount of buns could have repaired my body after the humiliating loss of stamina—what I call "sawdust"—caused

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by that astonishingly powerful Clarissa with the butterfly in her cap. It had come on to rain, too, and, altogether, I cut a sorry figure in her well-ordered apartment with the mats and the shells.

“No, I don’t hold with the votin’,” she pronounced, grasping my offering of a shiny card, decorated with Reginald’s portrait, the names of his supporters, and seven reasons for preferring him before all other candidates. “No, I don’t hold with the votin’, and, what’s more, if I did vote I must see first what he’s goin’ to do when he is in. I always was and have been Conservative, but I haven’t voted for forty years and I don’t care to undertake it. Besides, I’m not at all sure he’s the right man. There’s a great deal of mischief goes on in public-houses, and the question is ‘who’s goin’ to stop it?’ I was sayin’ to a gentleman as was in here the other day that I hoped they was going to send men on to the Council as *would* put a stop to it. . . . Yes, it’s very wet : I dare say you find it tirin’.”

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I wrote, "Mr. Ashfield call," with a very sharp pencil, against Clarissa's name, and thought with pleasure, as I ordered a fried sole and chop to follow, of Reginald pommelling her silly old head with masterly repartee. After lunch I thought, with a more refined and indulgent glee, of dear Reginald's silken head writhing under the podgy grasp of Clarissa's hand—metaphorically, of course.



After lunch I went with Reginald's sister Kate, who had just come back from college, to call on the Rev. Owen Griffiths ap Davis. I left her with him (which I would not have done had I known that a reverend gentleman could be so vicious) and

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went myself to recommend Reginald next door. Miss Kate told me afterwards exactly what happened, and having caught sight of Mr. ap Davis in the hall as he came out to see what all the talking was about, I could picture the scene exactly. Miss Kate curled up and looking very severe, the Reverend

Davis opposite her, spitting out his remarks with absurd venom.

“Well, I don’t mind telling you frankly that you are canvassing for quite the wrong man altogether, and you will allow me to

say that I hope very sincerely he won’t get in. I don’t know what he thinks about this Disestablishment Bill, but until that is passed I shall record my vote for whoever I think likely to put it in force. You say



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he's your brother? Well, I think, if you will excuse my putting it plainly, that the fewer men of the stamp of your brother that there are in this town the better. . . . Oh, no trouble I assure you. Nasty damp day. Good morning."

I had not met with much more success next door; in fact, I never got farther than the step. When Miss Amelia Carraway, dressmaker (I found this out by looking at her brass-plate), saw me from the window of her front room, where she was engaged behind the lace curtains with her mouth full of pins, she shot out at the door and at once gathered from my apologetic smile and the tell-tale cards in my hand what I had come about. I have drawn her in her room because she looks best there, although, in fact, I did not get so far until another day when I returned on legitimate business. She is like that "animal of merit, and perfect honesty, the ferret," who, we are told, "bites holes in leaves, ties knots in string, or practically anything," in the

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matter of clothes. But to return to that afternoon.

"It's my sister that's got the vote," she said in a rapid, dry patter. "No, thank

you, she doesn't vote. She's not the time. No, she doesn't care for it, thank you. No, you can't see her; she's busy. . . . No, it's no use, thank you. She's not interested. No, she won't come. . . . Oh, it's all right.

It's no trouble. There's been two ladies before. . . . Allow me. [Picking up my scattered cards.] Thank you. Good afternoon."

"That's a first-rate canvasser, I believe," said Miss Kate as we passed down Elysium Street, where a cheery little lady in warm



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clothes was standing in front of an open door. On the step, beside a steaming pail of water, the lady of the house was reluctantly wiping her hands on her apron in order to meet the persistent cordiality of her canvasser. As we passed I heard the cheerful little lady say, hopefully :

“ Well, good-bye, and you’ll say I called, won’t you ? ”

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE :
“ Oh, yes, I’ll tell ’im. He don’t take much interest in the votin’ ; he’s at

sea now. Of course if it were me it ’ud be the Liberals I’d be for. My father ’e always voted Liberal.”

CHEERFUL CANVASSER : “ Thank you. However, you’ll tell him ? ”



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"Then does she write 'at sea,' on her card?" I asked.

"More likely, 'carriage on day of election,'" replied Miss Kate bitterly. "At one election Polly was sent to fetch ninety people who were all at sea—except those who were dead!"

We were passing an oil-shop at the moment, and Miss Kate suddenly began to laugh. "If you can look through that door

without attracting attention," she said, "just take a good squint at Mr. Albert Vickers, and I'll tell you what happened there this morning."



Mr. Albert Vickers, who had a pale face and the eye of a cod—a cod, moreover, of whom its parents always boastfully foretold that it would "do something yet"—was leaning

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against his counter in his shirt-sleeves and a hat, negligently worn. His trousers were not well braced and he wore thin, brown boots.

“What happened?” I asked as we went along.

“Mrs. Henry went in quite airily,” said Miss Kate, “and began—‘Oh, I was just canvassing for the Conservative member,’ etc. Albert said, ‘Well, I don’t think I shall give me vote at all this year. I’m inclined to think we’d do better to be without ’em altogether and let the town manage itself a bit.’ ‘Oh, but we can’t do that, you know!’ said Mrs. Henry, ‘I dare say there are faults on both sides; but the Conservatives as a body——’ Albert went on as if she hadn’t spoken. ‘There’s none of ’em straight to the working man. Now, ’ow d’you make this out? I’m told there’s sixty-two councillors as sits down to champagne and shilling cigars four days out of the week——’ ‘But Mr. Ashfield never *touches* champagne,’ burst out Mrs. Henry, ‘and he’s very particular about *all* those

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things.' 'I don't say he isn't,' grumbled Albert. 'I don't know 'im. But from what I can 'ear I think it very likely that I shan't vote at all.'"

"And what do you suppose she put him down as?" I asked.

"Oh, Liberal, of course," said Miss Kate, with innocent surprise.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, with a sudden glance at my card, "this is where my next house is, and it is this cellar apparently. I must fish out some eyeglasses to go down these steps or I shall break my neck."

"It is Eliza Thomas's own vote," said Miss Kate, examining my card. "I will wait up here for you."

Eliza Thomas had, very likely, been celebrating her first centenary that afternoon in a glass of port. She was far and away deafer than the deafest person I have ever met. My throat becomes dry as I think about her.

"'Oo is it?" she asked, with her hand behind her ear. "There's been a lady

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round and give me this card [fetching from the mantelpiece the portrait of our hated rival], and I said I'd give me vote, so it'll be all right, my dear."

ME (very loudly and distinctly) : No, no. You are a CONSERVATIVE, you know. You mustn't vote for THAT one—THIS is the one."

ELIZA (with a reassuring dribble) :

"Oh yes, I said I'd vote. It'll be all right, my dear."

ME (bawling) : "YES—but you mustn't vote for THIS one. You're a CONSERVATIVE !"

ELIZA : "They told me it was to be for this one, but I don't know. Is't for the Parliament ?"

ME : "Oh no, the City Council. Do you know Canon Black ?"



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ELIZA : "Know 'oo?"

ME : "Canon Black. The low Churchman. Never mind; you have promised me the vote, and I'll call for you."

"Pouff!" I said, as I came up the steps. "That's hot work! Take my card, would you, please, dear, and write down 'carriage as early as possible.' It is just a question of which gets there first, Esau or Jacob."

"I have got one or two in this street," said Miss Kate. "I forgot about them, or I would have gone while you were cracking your tonsils down there. If you will go on slowly I will catch you up, and you can be resting your voice."

I walked down the street and turned back. I walked up the street and turned back. "In another minute," I thought, "I shall be arrested for loitering with intent. I wish Miss Kate would hurry up." I was just passing a little house with dingy green curtains half-way up the windows when, to my surprise, the door burst open and Miss Kate shot out like an arrow aimed with temper.

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“Run!” she breathed. “Run—don’t let him get us.”

We ran like sandpipers for a mile, and then Miss Kate stopped and looked behind her. “It’s all right,” she said, “I don’t think he has followed us. He was an anti-vivisectionist—just fancy! I would have sent one of the men from the committee rooms if I had known.”

“But you say he is an ‘anti,’” I remonstrated, a little peevish and out of breath. “If he is an ‘anti’ he wouldn’t have cut you up. What’s the fuss?”

“They *talk*,” said Miss Kate, with a long breath. There was a pause; I still didn’t understand.

“They *talk*!” she repeated. “He’s anti-vaccination too!”

“Well, he sounds most peaceable,” I said.



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"I can't understand your behaving like that at all."

"All right," she retorted, "go back and talk to him."

"It's no good doing that," I replied, "he has probably stopped by now."

"Not he!" said Miss Kate with a shudder. "He's only just begun."

"What are his politics?" I asked.

"No one knows," she replied, "not even his wife. She made me a sign from the door."

"Well, what have you written?" I persisted, for I had seen her scribble something as we ran. With a weak gesture she handed me her card, and against the name of William Evans I read, "*When you get home at bedtime mark, HELL!*"

"Come, come," I remonstrated, "that will never do. You can't send in that sort of remark to the committee rooms. It's quite one thing for Mr. Bernard Shaw and another for a young girl."

"All right. Put him down as a cubist

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if you like," she said defiantly. "I don't care."

"No," I said, "I'll tell you what—" and I wrote down, "Mrs. Ashfield call." "Polly is inclined to be self-opinionated and this trial may soften her."

I went alone to Solomon Levy, while Miss Kate finished her appointed round and went home for a cup of tea.

"I shall vote," Mr. Levy assured me, leaning over his newspaper with the remote look of a sage; "but I'm not going to tell you who it's for.— No, I shan't say.

I've never said who I've voted for. I can tell you it will be for the man who brings the rates down, but I'm not going to say who that



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is. . . . What's that you say? No, I'm not a Churchman, and I don't know the gentleman. I've my own views, and if we all do our duty that's enough, isn't it? What? Yes, I think so. It's enough for me anyway, and, what's more, I'd sooner vote for a man who had no religious opinions; he's more likely to be fair to all.

No, I shan't say.
Good day!"



"She's away, next door," said helpful Mrs. Murphy, with her large smile and the voice of a dove. I felt a sudden friendship towards her, as the thought struck me that any emotions she might ever feel

would be as untouched by human shame as are changes in the weather.

She was very dirty, but it was the dirt of

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a potato-field and a pigsty, which I find less revolting than "tapestry curtains, art table-covers, fancy and silk blouses, soiled evening dresses," and other horrors which, if we may believe the dry cleaners' advertisements, form so large a part of every refined home.

"She's away, next door," I heard the dove-like gurgle, when I had knocked in vain for some minutes at No. 47. "I think it'll be the Liberals she's for, but you'll do well to call again. We've not the vote, else we'd be pleased to oblige you, for we're both Conservative. There's been six ladies before, but you can leave another picture and welcome. . . . Oh, it's all right— Get back, now, Flora, and leave the lady alone. Have y' tried Mr. Hanny, now, on the other side? It's likely he might vote if y' asked him."

"One more," I said to myself, "and then Polly shall give me tea, or be answerable for my loss." Stanmore Road was on my way home, and I proposed to have a word with Mr. James Groat. That would leave me

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only three to do after tea. I knocked at the door. It was opened, after some delay and shouting, by a minx—M-I-N-X—minx. Editors, I notice, always alter this name to “maiden,” or “débutante,” or something that does not mean quite the same thing. A minx, therefore, standing with reluctant feet where the door and door-step meet. I



asked if Mr. Groat were at home, and she replied that she would “just see”; I could wait if I liked. She came back in a few minutes, leaving the parlour door open.

“Father says, ken’t you send a message; he’s busy,” she clipped. (You will, perhaps, observe “Father” in

the picture.) I said “No,” out of sheer contrariness, and added that I only wanted to ask him one question.

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She returned again to the parlour, where a short conversation of whispers and snorts took place.

"He says he doesn't mind the voting, and you can leave it," was the next message. "He'll see about it. . . . No, you needn't put him down anything at all; he kent' attend to you now."

I found Polly sitting with her feet up on the sofa, trying to pour out tea. "It's all right," she said, in answer to my criticism of her manners. "I have just been arguing with a gentleman of the name of Potts, who kept his feet up the whole time I was talking to him. I never got a word in. He just lay and smoked, and talked me down, so I thought I would come home and revenge myself on his memory."

"I wish you would hurry up and give me some tea," I said.

"Mr. Potts was just about to enjoy his when I called," Polly continued, aggravatingly suspending the teapot. "'E's just come 'ome to 'is tea, Miss,' his silly wife,

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with a black eye, informed me—as if that were any excuse for lying on the sofa when a lady called.”



“Quite so,” I replied. “Please get up and pass me the cake.”

“All right,” said Polly.

“Well, as I was saying, I said to Mr. Potts, ‘Oh, Mr. Potts, I was just canvassing for my,’ etc. etc. Mr. Potts shifted his pipe and spat, and then bellowed at me, ‘Well, I’m a ——’—now what was it he said he was? How stupid! I can’t remember.”

“An ill-mannered ape, perhaps,” I suggested.

“No, no. I mean that he held principles of some sort,” Polly continued, taxing her brain. “Anyhow, it doesn’t matter. ‘And I’m going,’ he assured me, ‘to vote for them as’ll be true to [whatever-principle-it-was-he-held] principles on the Council.’ ‘Oh,

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but,' I chipped in, 'my husband is *very* strong on that point.' (I wish I could remember what it was, and ask Reginald.) 'I know,' he replied; 'they all say that, but they don't DEW it. They want more men like' (I forget whether it was Keir Hardie or Cunninghame Graham he said) 'to make 'em DEW it. There's not a member of that there Watch Committee as is fit to be on it.' (What is the Watch Committee—do you know?) 'It's time something was done, and we're going to elect men as will DEW it, and not be afraid to speak out on the Council. I've not thought about it yet,' he added (just fancy the cheek!), 'but I'll see when the time comes.'"

"What did you put on your card?" I asked. "It is such a help to me to know the sort of way to classify these people."

"Oh, I didn't attempt to classify him," said Polly. "I just wrote, 'Some one else call,' and then I came home and put my own feet up and smoked."

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“I shan’t do much more to-day,” I said, when we had finished tea.

“Don’t do any more at all, unless you like,” Polly remarked generously. “I am not going to. I can’t risk two Mr. Pottses in one day.”

“I have got three more on my card,” I said, “and I would like to finish them if I can, but not if it’s going to rain again ; it’s too depressing.”

On my way to Paradise Terrace I met the same little school-teacher lady whom I had first seen attacking the preoccupied mother of the baby who was so contentedly grasping the carving-knife. This time the little canvasser was standing looking forlorn and discouraged before an excessively clean housewife, who, late though it was, knelt by her door-step, ornamenting it with a pattern in yellow donkey-stone. A person like that would never have delayed to wash her step until the afternoon, so I expect she was removing the traces of some bold spirit who had ventured to take tea with her.

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"No, he's not at home," she was saying, without pausing in her work. "Couldn't say, I'm sure, when he will be. . . . I couldn't say."

(In answer to a timid question):

"I never asked him. He always votes himself, and never mentions it to me. You can leave the card. I think



he's had one. . . ." (Another timid question): "I couldn't say. Sometimes he's not back until two in the morning from his work. . . . Yes, I'll tell him. Good afternoon."

The little lady turned dejectedly away, her brightness all crushed, and I went on to Paradise Terrace. But before I got there the rain came on again, and I was fumbling under my umbrella for the everlasting cards, when Mrs. Salisbury came to the door on

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her way out, dangling a large key from her finger.

“Conservative!” she said, when I explained my errand. “I used to be, but I voted for the Liberals last time, because the Conservatives, to my mind, ain’t actin’ straight. They do more ’arm than good, and, like enough, I shan’t give me vote at all this year. I ’aven’t made up me mind. I shall hear what’s said a bit first, and what they’re going to do. It’s as much as I can do to pay me rent as it is. . . . Oh yes, I’ve

got ’is picture ; yer needn’t leave any more. I’ll just think it over.”

“Yes,” I said to myself as I turned away, “so will I think it over—in the seclusion of my own apartments.”

For three weeks this was my daily life, and at last we went to the poll—all of us,



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shepherds and sheep—in borrowed carriages, motors, traps, and side-cars. It would take another chapter to describe the fever and the flurry, the mistakes, the counter-orders, the number of canvassers sent at once to the same house to fetch hale and hearty supporters of the opposite party, while faithful invalids who had hobbled to our assistance for eighty years were never fetched at all. However, when the last bedridden cripple had been hoisted into a motor at the eleventh hour, and the door of the polling-booth had been held open by courtesy for an extra moment, only to find that his name was not on the Register, we went back to supper feeling that we *didn't care!* They might elect the Rev. Griffiths ap Davis if they liked, or carry Mr. Potts or the Anti-Vaccinator shoulder-high, and proclaim him king if they were so disposed. All that we wanted was food and a fender. But by ten o'clock we were all in Reginald's club, shouting ourselves hoarse, and by a quarter past he and Polly were in such a turmoil

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of speeches, and handshaking, and general absurdity, that I slipped out at a side door and took a taxi home. Half an hour afterwards I laid my weary head uncombed upon the pillow.

CHAPTER XV : LETTERS OF GEORGINA BROWN

“LONGMOOR,” MILLPORT.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—The address on this paper does not mean that I have run away with a rich merchant. There is one in the house, but I am not his affianced bride. What has happened is far more absurd, and bewildering, and unaccountable. He wants me to paint his portrait, and, “if it is satisfactory,” as he says, I have his leave to go on to mamma and the children. Unfortunately, they are not a very reproductive family, or else I might have become a naturalized member of it ; while I was painting one child, they could be getting another ready, and so on, until my old hands were hardly able to handle the brush.

What moved these people to choose me for the task is an interesting problem. I rather suspect that it was my weak points.

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To begin with, it was Bessie Lovelace's idea ; you know she was at school with me, and the merchant's wife is her second cousin. She told them that I have remarkable talent, and am to be had cheap (God forgive her !). But still, that was only the placing by a master hand of a germinal spot within the protoplasm of their intelligence. A lot more was needed before that spot became the full-blown absurdity which it is now. It had to be fed and kept warm by some natural inclination on their part.

Here it was, I believe, that my weak points came in. You know as well as I do what is bad in my work. A certain sickness creeps into it, do what I will. I can't trace this quality in my tastes, except that I have a passion for over-ripe melons, and I feel a stirring in my gizzard when I am in a dark church, and the little choir boys look more saintly than my reason tells me that they are. But the main thing is that I am here and likely to stay some weeks at any rate.

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The house is like nothing you can ever have seen unless you have been in one of the large provincial towns. It is not a town house nor a country house nor a cottage. It is more as if its father were a seaside hotel, and its mother were a villa, and it took after an aunt who had been a country house. There are two tennis lawns and a croquet lawn fenced round by netting. There are round flower beds and wide borders full of flowers of the sort that gardeners always delight in. I don't mean the job gardeners that you and I labour under—they wouldn't allow us to have any beds at all, because flowers "make work." I mean the experienced and rather huffy gardeners, who are employed by the rich, and who are indifferent to work because they don't do any. I think that Waring and Gillow must, originally, have supplied the garden as well as the furniture, because the flowers are all in "suites," and they go so well with the curtains. They look unusually expensive, and as if they wouldn't

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have very much smell. The roses, which all belong to the very best families, and are named after baronets' wives, live apart in a sheltered elegance of their own. The vegetables and the hens amuse themselves as they like behind the garage. The clean and prosperous-looking garage, dividing the vegetables from the flowers, has a funny resemblance to the position of their owner and his place of business in the social scale. In former days there would have been a discreet plantation of shrubs between the stables and the flower garden, between traffic and the retreat of elegance. Now the shrubs are behind the garage, but still in front of the lowest society (the vegetables and the hens). Next year I confidently expect to see a hen lolling with a parasol under every rose bush, and rhubarb flourishing in the window boxes. It will be quite sad for the poor democrats when they have removed the last social barrier. They will have, as it were, to teach the *amœba* to cheek the hens and the vegetables.

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The garage shelters an any-number-of-horse-power Rolls-Royce, which must not be used too often, and an open car with a canvas hood. This one jolts so much that when we are all in it we grind against one another the whole way, like stones washed about on the beach. The chauffeur hates it, and has blown it up twice, but they always stick it together again to save the Rolls-Royce. I forgot to say that in the West End, so to speak, of the garden there is a hot-house where they keep the huffiest gardener of all. He must not be spoken to except in questions, but if you ask the right kind—not knowing too much, and yet not being at all silly—he gives you three spiky things, one red, one blue, and one yellow, which don't look nice in a vase, and which you can't wear.

Every one here is hospitable in a way that exasperates, because it embarrasses me, and I cannot understand why it should. I have often felt this anger with people who are ill at ease in their bodies. Whenever I find

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them doing some kindly, simple thing, it is as if I had stumbled into their bedrooms when they were having a bath. In the same way I cannot be as friendly as I feel, because they would dislike it as much as if I wore an unconventionally low-cut dress. The man himself is so nervously suspicious of friendliness that he sometimes makes me think of a darling old scarecrow in a field from which all the crops have been gathered long ago. Or can you imagine a Lifeguardsman feeling so shy and indelicate without his full-dress uniform that he insists on wearing a tea-tray strapped to his chest when he is off duty? That is the sort of defensive attitude that Millport people adopt towards their friends.

The children are a little disappointing. They have cracky voices and want too much. They have been brought up by a nurse who is accustomed to every luxury except freedom of opinion, and has, therefore, no repose of manner, and they themselves are in a perpetual state of discontent, looking for

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El Dorado in their neighbours' larders. Children have a certain community with animals, which makes it unnatural for them to desire anything that they cannot—by fair means or foul—get for themselves, and although these twins and their brother are still young enough to have some remnants of individual taste, they are rapidly settling down into their parents' habit of systematic borrowing — borrowed hopes and fears, borrowed likes and dislikes—everything, in fact, except a borrowed husband. I do not want a borrowed husband, but for the life of me I cannot understand why it should be necessary to draw the line there when everything else, from the phrase on our lips to our idea of Divine Revelation, is borrowed from the borrowings of our neighbours.

To-morrow I am going to begin on the first portrait. You will probably say that it is unnecessary to have any sittings at all, as with a grain of imagination it would be easy to paint a portrait that would fit any

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commercial gentleman. But I am beginning to know something about the species and to recognize differences between them, just as my particular one knows a difference between grains of corn. Of course, in many things there is a certain uniformity between him and others of his kind. His house, for instance, is like the houses of his friends, but that is partly because bad architecture is a sort of head-and-hand disease which breaks out in some architect's office and spreads rapidly to others. A man gets a bad house in his head, and the design is carried from one town to another until people get used to living in bad houses just as they once got used to being marked with small-pox, and very few of them have the intelligence and the technical knowledge to invent a cure even if they have the time or the money. Naturally, good houses are built sometimes, but their architects are probably in a state of moral health that can only be transmitted by the slower process of breeding. It does not seem to be contagious.

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I wish that somebody would investigate the pathology of taste.

Neither are my sitter's habits altogether peculiar to himself, because of the borrowing propensities of his womenkind. He has not the time nor the energy, when he gets home in the evening, to think out what he wants, therefore he exercises his personal taste at the office, and borrows comfortably, like the others, when he is at home. I hope you understand all this stuff about borrowing ; I know that we have all got to live on other people, but while it seems suitable to borrow a neighbour's fowl if we eat it up and it is made into blood and muscle and energy, yet it is merely disgusting to swallow it whole and then treat it as the whale treated Jonah. I have been living lately in drawing-rooms that are strewn with conversational Jonahs.

But there are bits of the man which are quite his own, and these bits he keeps in town. Every day at five o'clock he hangs up his individuality on a nail behind his

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office door, and when he comes home he slips on an easy suit of tastes provided for him by his wife. What a revolution there would be if he once brought home the creature whom he hangs up at the office ! He knows good from bad there ; he is not imposed upon by meaningless phrases ; he can conceive a fine scheme, and is master of the technical details necessary to its perfection. I believe that his honesty and shrewdness would teach him discrimination in the things which he buys for his house, but the poor man is too tired to fight the battle of honesty both against thieves abroad and against his wife at home, so he gladly accepts any opinions upon unimportant subjects so long as they admit of comfortable arm-chairs and are not too expensive.

Now and then he indulges in one of his natural vices, as, for instance, when he allowed himself to enjoy the over-ripe melons and choir boys of my pictures, although he knew quite well that his wife would rather have commissioned some one

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equally bad but with a safer reputation. In this case he had enough support from Bessie and her friends to make it possible for him to indulge his taste without appearing absolutely eccentric. So now I think you know why I am here.

He met me himself at the station, with the small car, not the Rolls-Royce. It is about twenty minutes rattle out to Holly Park, where he lives. "Longmoor" is the name of the house. I noticed it on the fragile gatepost as we squeezed and scraped up to the front door, just missing the lobelias. A butler came out, looking exceedingly angry. I have seen inscrutable, wooden servants, and rough, loutish servants, and flighty, silly servants, but I never before saw permanently angry servants, such as they keep in Millport. The creatures are quite good-tempered when you get to know them ; the anger is just a trade-mark to show that they are the genuine, old, tawny Millport, and would sooner give a month's notice than put up with something

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—I have not yet discovered what ! One imagines that a certain amount of abstract indignation is necessary to them in the same way as a parrot requires chillies in its food. It may be difficult to digest “the best families,” unless one is indignant with everybody who differs from them.

There was a tremendous barking when we arrived ; a dog barking in just the same tone of voice as the butler looked. I could hear it shrieking : “ What’s this ? What’s it all about ? Who said so ? Who has come ? What are they for ? Don’t let them in ! I shall have to hear something first before I can give an opinion ! ”

When the animal appeared, I thought him less like a dog than an imitation of one ; he ought to have had green wheels and a flannel tongue. He is a priggish little thing, who knows when there are peas for dinner, and expects to be asked to beg at tea-time, instead of being ashamed of his tricks, like a decent dog. He is, actually, offended if no one asks him to make a fool

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of himself. I know he thinks that all ladies ought to like to see a little dog beg so nicely—it ought to make them laugh. I always smoke in his face when he does it, which I wouldn't do to any other dog; but he maddens me. The merchant threw down his hat wearily, snapped his fingers at "Punch," as the little beast is



called, looked through the letters that were on the hall table, and then asked for his wife. She was in the garden, and there we found her sitting among the remains of tea, struggling with an acrostic in some magazine. The angry butler caught up the teapot, as if it had made a face at him, and bore it off to refill it, evidently against both its wish and his.

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Mrs. Merchant has a great deal of a certain quality, definite enough, but for which I know of no name, which is in part natural goodness and, in part, only a queen-like unawareness. Whatever it is, it reacts on some submerged part of my character, and produces in me a sort of street arab whom I do not recognize. You know that I am not fast nor vicious nor dishonest, only an ordinary person enjoying life, yet with this woman I feel like Eve after the Fall. I rush helter-skelter from every topic of conversation, covering my harmless, natural thoughts with platitudes. Some serpent has told her that I have an "artistic temperament," and I see her straining her mind, enough to rupture it, in efforts to appear "understanding." I am supposed to know how many pictures Lord Leighton painted, and what are "the things to admire" in the Academy — "all the nice, out-of-the-way things," she calls them. I told her once that I should like to draw the huffy butler, and she said it had never occurred to her

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that he was picturesque, but perhaps I was right, and what costume would I like to "do" him in.

Now, please do not remind me that a moment ago I was blaming these people for covering their instinctive thoughts of kindness, and that I spoke contemptuously of uniforms and tea-trays, while I now confess to covering my own thoughts with platitudes. The truth is that this is the most self-conscious household I ever was in, and when I see them all rushing for covert, of course I catch the panic without knowing what is the matter. Then, when all is calm, I get very angry at seeing myself and them tightly wrapped in moral shawls of one kind or another. The sight of the others' shawls makes me conscious of my own, and I begin to tickle all over and fidget with annoyance.

We had such a good dinner! *Vol-au-vents*, and *mousses*, and *soufflés*, with ice inside them, and such horrid coffee! Mrs. Merchant lit a cigarette afterwards, spluttering when she

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got any smoke, and chewing the end to ribbons ; not as a hospitable fiction, for she did not begin until after I had finished ; but she says she likes an occasional cigarette. You do not smoke, I know, but you have fifteen love-affairs a week, so I can explain the absurdity of the occasional cigarette in terms that you will understand, by saying that it is as if some one told you she did so enjoy being made love to, now and then—about once a year—by a really nice old gentleman with a bald head, so long as he did not attempt to kiss her.

Some people came to dinner that evening. I had forgotten to tell you, being so busy about the food and tobacco. I shall call every one whom I meet here—including the Merchants—by the name of whatever they look like, because then you can tell that inquisitive Bessie, if she asks you, that you do not know whom I have met. She enjoys everything too much for it to be quite right to describe people by name to her. She stores things in her mind, and brings out plums for

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her guests in a way that is more hospitable than discreet.

I shall call the people who came Mr. and Mrs. Ritz-Trotter, Miss Darling, and Mr. Friseur. I am always puzzled as to how the Mr. Ritz-Trotters get wives. They are all right in an office, or on a board, or as butlers, or in any kind of man's work (except soldiering, or sailing, or diplomacy). But why does anyone want such a person in the house to keep? If one had dozens of husbands, it would be useful to have one Mr. Ritz-Trotter to manage the shares, and tell one where to sign things; but as we are limited to one, it seems such a waste of a unique opportunity to choose that sort. When Mr. Ritz-Trotter was young, he can, at best, only have been like Mr. Friseur, who looks to me altogether a bad egg so far as companionship is concerned.

I have called the young one Friseur, because he is like a hairdresser's assistant, though that is, perhaps, scarcely fair on the hairdressing profession.

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Personally, I do not like the chatty young man at Beau's, who tells me that my hair is a very dressy colour, and that Blackpool is likely to be full this year ; but at least he has a definite nervous system and vertebræ, so that he can jump about. I expect he will develop some day into a cheery old person, whereas Mr. Friseur, who is only in the first stage of becoming a Mr. Ritz-Trotter, will go on getting more and more depressing.

Women like Mrs. Ritz-Trotter are wonderfully adaptable. I think that if she were taken away now and given to a pirate, the natural fidelity and cheerfulness that keep her attached to her husband would turn her into a very attractive woman. But to acquire any decorative value these gems of character have to be cut by a life of more active horror than her present one. She was dressed last night in very expensive clothes, just enough like those of the *demi-monde* to be thought up to date, but not sufficiently like them to scare her magnate, who is as conscious of the habits of such ladies as a jelly-fish is aware

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of the presence of titbits on the shore, even if they are not actually within his reach.

Mr. Friseur took me into dinner, and tired me so much that I was obliged to drink champagne,

which is always bad for me. You know those dreadful things called Sparklets? You can shoot them into anything, and make it fizz—"aerate" is the proper word. If you can imagine aerated mutton



—sparkling mutton—you will know what that young man's conversation was like. I could see it, in my mind's eye, advertised as "Friseur's Frisky Food for Fascinating Females." It got up my nose and stodged my spiritual digestion at the same time.

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When I let loose any pleasant fancy, he became sentimental ; and when, just to restore his balance, I talked about bishops, and asked him to 'pass the mustard, his ideas frothed clumsily, and he said that he didn't know artists went to church—and wasn't mustard bad for the palette ! I know he was trying to please me, poor thing, and that I was very ungrateful and nasty ; but I felt all the time that he was really resorting to the device of the curlew, who utters shrill cries to divert the attention of a harmless traveller from its nest. He was trying to prevent me from remembering that he had had a respectable commercial home and upbringing. If young men in business had more outdoor pursuits, they would easily see in proper proportion such a trifle as their own origin. It is sitting on an office stool that makes people begin to wish that they were descended from a long line of Vikings. Miss Darling, I find, loves the silly thing, and intends to marry him. She is a simple person with a heart of velvet, and she will

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grow old with her hairdresser, taking him out to dinner three times a week, seeing the sparkle subside and the mutton grow tough. She will have, probably, about three sententious, knock-kneed little boys, and one anæmic, over-dressed little girl, and will end her days in a house three times as large as the one in which she began housekeeping. There ought to be a larger kind of men who prey upon and eat hairdressers.

I will write next week, and continue the story of what a journalist would call "A lady artist's plucky attempt to disarm Provincials."

Yours ever,

GEORGINA.

CHAPTER XVI

“LONGMOOR,” MILLPORT.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—I have nearly finished Mr. Merchant's portrait. I showed it to him yesterday for the first time, and it apparently “proves satisfactory,” so I shall very likely be here for weeks. He gives me two hours sitting every day, which, I am beginning to realize, is a remarkable thing for a business man to do. It is almost the first time in his life, except during the inevitable August, that he has not left his house at a quarter to nine every morning. But he has been ill, and I think that he intends, sooner or later, to retire from business and live away from town, as this is what they all aspire to. In the meantime he is only allowed to work for a few hours at a time, so he has taken the opportunity to have his portrait painted and so fill up the leisure which might otherwise hang heavy on his hands.

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He went off this morning at eleven, and I worked on without him until luncheon. Then I was shown some more of the social machinery of Millport; that part of it which decides in what mood the fighting apparatus shall begin its day's work—a very important matter, if you come to think of it. Mrs. Merchant had a party of women representing different sections of society, and, so far as I could judge, they did not seem to be working quite in unison. The only one whom I knew was Miss Darling, who is a great friend of Mrs. Merchant's and comes to everything. There was also a fat, elderly thing, in a satin coat and skirt, plumed hat and boa, besides a prettier edition of Mrs. Merchant, dressed in tweeds, which are the uniform of the more distant suburbs and indicate the magic word "county"; and last of all, like a French squirrel in a hurry, murmuring some domestic apology, the wife of a professor at the University.

You know how, in any town which is

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given up to a University, even the bald-faced old women with hair like char-

women's, who stamp through their social



duties with the corsetless aplomb of the born moralizer, are recognized as forming a sort of aristocracy in keeping with the spirit of the place. But here all the academic flowers, good and bad alike, are looked upon as

interlopers. I have heard many of the *vieillesse dorée* of Millport lump them together indiscriminately as "peculiar" and "too clever for us." If I had my way I would make it criminal libel to apply the word "clever" to any persons but those who have been found guilty of attempted intelligence. The Romans are spoken of in

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history books as having brought the blessing of education to the untutored savages of ancient Britain. But I can imagine the snuffy look on the faces of the female aristocracy in woad when the high-browed matrons of Rome landed among them, armed with copy-books. You may see the same look spread over a party of Millport Druids and their wives when the University is mentioned.

I don't think that everybody by nature likes being educated. Improvement is forced on some by others who have an inherent morbid craving for it, and when the victims have been compelled to accept it, they behave as the fox who was accidentally deprived of his tail behaved to his friends who had escaped the misfortune. The foxes of Millport are, one by one, losing their tails. The old-fashioned appendages of fat and fur no longer command general respect among the neighbours ; yet the fashion dies hard. All the same, how pleasant a few little feathery tails, sewn with sequins, would be in Oxford

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or Cambridge, would they not? It is so tiresome when people insist on all trying to be one particular thing.

But to go on with the luncheon-party. The fat elderly fox was invited to lead the way to the dining-room, and she gave the impression that if she had not been asked to lead the way she would have led it of her own accord. She has such an expres-



sive back; it seems to be waiting impatiently for other people to do right, yet almost hoping they won't, so that she may have the pleasure of correcting them. Mrs. County followed next, with the good-natured

politeness of a Prime Minister sent in to dinner behind a knight; the French squirrel

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smiled at us and went after them, and Miss Darling and I scuffled amiably in the doorway over Mrs. Merchant's toes.

The hostess's task was a difficult one, but she showed wonderful tact. She was conscious of having at her table two persons who represented the established authority of commerce and landed property (even if it is only a couple of fields and a carriage sweep for flies to drive up). Opposed to these were two others, one of whom (myself) belonged to a community whose wildness and eccentricity, it was rumoured, knew no bounds, while the other (from the University) was associated with certain unintelligible heathens who were said to "poke fun" at the idols of Mrs. Bushytail, Mrs. County and herself. Miss Darling, she knew, could be relied upon to interpose her soft form as a cushion if anybody took to throwing anything: still it was anxious work.

"The trees are quite losing their leaves, are they not?" began Miss Darling, unfolding

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her napkin. It was like the tuning up of the violins before the rise of the curtain. I tried to tune up too, but no words would come. Do you remember how Dick told us that he sometimes could think of nothing to say but, "Do you wear drawers in autumn?" The trees reminded me of it.

"Yes, aren't they, dreadfully?" said Mrs. Merchant. "It is quite sad." We had some more tuning up, Mrs. Bushytail (I still refuse to give you their real names because you and Bessie are too unreliable) taking the part of the drum.

"Ahem! B-r-r-r-r-um!" she coughed. "It is quite impossible to count on the seasons at all in these days. They are all at sixes and sevens. Such warm weather at this time of year cannot be healthy."

Mrs. County gave us a few languid runs on the French horn, foreshadowing her *leit motif*, the West Cheddar pack, with whom she hunts now and then. She said that frosts were of no value to anyone except

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plumbers, and that now everybody found Christmas such a bore, it seemed hardly worth while having snow and all that sort of thing, except that it made an occupation for the poor wretches in town to shovel it away. It kept them in the fresh air instead of stewing at home all day.

Perhaps Mrs. Merchant thought that the tuning up was getting too discordant, for she collected us with her eye and gave out the hymn of Literature. You see, literature is such a good subject, because it can never get hackneyed (with so many books coming out each year), and everybody is sure to have read something. Sooner or later Mrs. Bushytail's voice makes itself heard above any babel. She had the upper hand of us in a moment, and discussion lay dead beside her plate. One would suppose that the *raison d'être* of human speech was to further exchanges of opinion, but Mrs. Bushytail pursues this intention with relentless ferocity as if were moral vermin.

“No interesting books are written nowa-

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days," she said, giving a final throttle to our already extinct debate. "They seem all nonsense about heredity and character, and things of that sort. That doesn't make evil any better. If people had larger families there would be bound to be some good children among the lot, and the others would soon find their level."

Miss Darling interposed her velvet heart between further severity and us.

"You ought to read some of George Birmingham's books," she said bravely. "They are so amusing, and not a bit morbid."

"I have read one," flourished the old lady, "and I never met with greater nonsense in my life. Most impossible rubbish. I know numbers of Irish people, and they are indolent and dreamy, with an immense respect for England. I never heard of any of them poking fun at our Members of Parliament, and that sort of thing, and they were all far too idle to think of going on ridiculous adventures. What do you think,

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Mrs. Cambridge? Your husband is an authority on literature I am told." This was no more an invitation to discussion than is the spider's lure the bidding of a genial host, but Mrs. Cambridge is far from ingenuous.

"We both liked some of them," she said quietly, "but then my husband is Irish, you know, so you must excuse him."

Mrs. Bushytail scowled at her and remarked, "Humph! I suppose there are different grades of society in Ireland, just as there are here. Are any of you going to the Mayor's reception?"

"I suppose I ought to go," said Mrs. County wearily, "but I declined; they are such dreadful people!"

Mrs. Merchant said that she was going, and asked me if I would like to go with her. She added, poor dear, that she was "afraid I should not find it very lively—not like my Bohemian parties with all the great Academicians, and clever people. . . ."

Dear Louise, why does not a merciful

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Providence, whose will it is to fashion us in such humorous variety, put directions for use on our backs, or send a bottle of medium with us by which we could communicate with one another? Ought I to have replied, "Dear Mrs. Merchant, I will make the best of your friends, and when you come to stay with me I will try to collect some people with double chins and dictatorial manners who know all about boiling soap and making beef-juice"? I should take it for granted that she would like my friends, or, at all events, that she would find something interesting in them, and perhaps enjoy a change from her own species. So why is it to be supposed that I cannot live without my own form of shop?

"Who is the present Mayor?" asked Mrs. Cambridge. "He came to the University the other day, and I thought he looked rather a strange person to have at the head of a big city like this."

"Not a gentleman, *of course*," pronounced our Dictator, helping herself to another lot

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of Pêches Melba (the vigorous old creature had cherry-brandy with it too), "but a very capable man. He is on our hospital committee and he puts his foot down on the younger men in a very admirable way; never wastes too much time on discussion. A splendid financier; doesn't allow improvements to be carried beyond a reasonable distance."

"He has dreadful manners, though," sighed Mrs. County, who eats nothing but vegetables, and refuses sweets because she says they spoil her form at badminton. "The Duchess presided at the annual meeting of our Waifs and Strays at the Town Hall the other day, and she said that the Mayor made his speech with his foot on her muff."

"Then she shouldn't have left her muff on the floor," replied Mrs. Bushytail. "The Duchess was an old friend of mine when you were in the schoolroom, my dear, and I shall tell her that she ought to take better care of her things."

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“ Lady Seelby said the Town Hall smelt very strong of onions,” Mrs. County ventured again with her eyes half shut.

I was pleased at things going like this—maliciously pleased. Instead of the two suspected firebrands setting up a conflagration in the camp, there were the two representatives of law and order (the town and the county) sparring together over the personal habits of the chief magistrate ; while the heathen and the anarchist sat with milk and honey on their lips, ready to pour balm on the wounds of the combatants !

All the same, I think that Mrs. Cambridge and I would have let them lose a little more blood before we actually interfered ; but Miss Darling flew to the rescue and stopped a second round by saying that the dear Mayoress had been so sweet with the children on Empire Day, and that no one knew what a powerful force the Mayor was among the inebriates of the city. She hoped it was not going to rain : it was looking rather threatening. But what a lovely colour

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the leaves were at this time of year. It seemed so sad that they must all come off.

"We will drive you to the reception, dear," said Mrs. Merchant gratefully ; and then we all rose, and I escaped into the garden to have a cigarette behind the lobelias.

When Mrs. Bushytail had driven off in a robust brougham, her two obese horses guided by an apoplectic old man, and Mrs. County had departed on foot to whatever cross-bred residence her husband's particular brand of ketchup provides for her, Miss Darling, Mrs. Cambridge (who was also going to the reception), Mrs. Merchant and I spread ourselves comfortably in the Rolls-Royce, and were driven to the Town Hall.

Numbers of people were in the great hall, waiting to meet their friends. There was a large sprinkling of Bushytails and Countys, but most of the crowd were of another type, which I have not met before. I took them to be honest tradesmen of the oblong and erratic shapes which seem inseparable from commerce. But several of them turned out

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to belong to the best society, and the dumpiest one of all, dressed in the most creased and stained frock-coat and the worst trousers, was Mrs. Cambridge's husband. I have sometimes wondered why both commercial and professional men are often so incurably slovenly, and I begin to think it must be owing to some instinct of self-preservation which leads them to shun the sort of women who would look after their clothes by force. To make a busy man look tidy when he does not want to, it must be necessary to worry him all day, and no doubt women who have the firmness and pertinacity for the task are recognized by naturally baggy men in the same way as the presence of a cat is scented from afar by even the most absent-minded mouse.

At the top of a wide staircase decorated with palms we found the Mayor and Mayoress. Bessie would have called them "fairies," but you know how inappropriate her descriptions are. Anything from a round of beef to a rainbow may be a fairy

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if it excites her imagination. But, indeed, they were wonderful ! Have you ever seen a mayor ? If not, take a stock-broker and stuff him quite tight until he creaks. Dress half of him for a wedding—not forgetting spats—and the other half for “standing at the



plate” outside a Scotch kirk (he wears a white tie and a frock-coat). Dab bits of fur on his eyebrows, but not on his head—you leave that quite bare—and then hang a heavy locket and chain round his neck. For a mayoress, take a gentle, timid old lady out of a woolshop. Dress her regardless of expense, and frighten her to death. Then hang another locket and chain round her neck, and there you are !

They were both shaking hands with the

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rapidity of an experienced cook shelling peas. Each of us was emptied out of our identity and cast into the room beyond, pressed on by the growing mass of those who had fulfilled the object for which they came. By and by we reached the edge of the heap and looked about us. Mrs. Bushytail and Mrs. County, each the centre of a group, were dispensing the milk of their several words with reckless liberality. Presently Mrs. Merchant drew me to a small table covered with plates of bread-and-butter, mixed biscuits, and wedding cake. Then she artfully picked two or three of her friends out of the different groups, and formed them into a small private tea-party. A maidservant brought us tea—so strong that it tasted like beef-juice and tobacco mixed—and while we were drinking it I saw for the first time that a really nice girl was making herself frightfully hot by singing at the top of her voice. None of us had realized what was happening, only it seemed to me that it was becoming more and more difficult to make oneself heard.

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Mrs. Bushytail came to our table, and there were also a German and his wife, both of whom I liked very much. It was he who first noticed the poor girl singing.

"*Ach, was!*" he said, "der is music, and we knew not. Let us listen." We all listened hard, but all I could hear was, "blows—part—rose—heart—" and Mrs. Merchant said, "That lovely thing! I always like it so much."

"She has a goot voice," said the German lady, "but not str-r-r-ong."

"Absurd!" Mrs. Bushytail informed us. "They should have had a man to do it."

The noise was fearful. You know what a party is always like—a yapping and drumming that never stops, and every one stuffing something down holes in their faces—you don't notice this effect unless everybody is eating at once—and the room began to smell like an oven full of mice.

Mrs. Merchant asked whether I had noticed the portraits hung round the room.

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She added that they were considered very good.

"They are all Mayors, *hein?*" said the German, peering through his spectacles.

"Kings," Mrs. Bushytail explained angrily, "all kings. We don't keep the Mayors here ; they are in the Council Chamber."

"So we keep our Kaisers," said the German's kind wife. "You are patriotic too ? That is good. They look very nice standing so." She puffed out her chest, and thrust a gloved hand into the front of her mantle.

"Were the pictures presented to the Town Hall ?" Mrs. Cambridge inquired.

"No," said Mrs. Bushytail, with reasonable pride, "the city paid for them ; immense sums. They are a great deal larger than any at the Guildhall. What do you think of them ?" she asked me. "You ought to be a judge of art."

"I think they are beautiful," I said. "They make me feel, for the first time in my life, that I should like to be married to

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a king. I love splash and rolls of parchment and thunderstorms. I quite see what you like about them."

I do not know whether I meant to tease her or not. The pictures are just what I said, but I think that if I had liked her better I might have said the same thing in a different way. Anyhow, it did not do at all. My German made it worse by saying critically, "Yes, that is so, you have it quite. Now in Germany we care for the skill, for the worthiness of the picture. We make, perhaps, too much of it. And you, you care more for the sentiment—the 'splash' you call it? What the common people shall understand. Very good. You are quaiter-raight."

Mercifully the fact that he had not been introduced to Mrs. Bushytail prevented her from using other weapons of destruction than a look, which glanced off his spectacles as harmlessly as summer lightning. But Mrs. Merchant was clearly uneasy, scenting trouble, but uncertain in which

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direction it lay. She therefore slipped away, taking me with her. Heavens ! the dressing gong ! and I was just going to tell you something more amusing about the Cambridges. I will write again.

Yours ever,
GEORGINA.

CHAPTER XVII

UNITY SQUARE, MILLPORT.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—I am sorry that you are getting out of breath with my experiences; but just think what it must be for me to have to go through them! If I had not a better-balanced mind and a more stable temperament than yours, I should probably have been returned dead on your hands a week ago, and you would have found that far more disturbing than reading my letters.

I am writing from the University, because the Merchants' eldest child has got measles. The higher powers are so ingenious in devising these little bits of action to brighten up the plot of one's life! Measles is not the sort of thing I should ever have thought of for myself, but it has varied my days here to an extent that I should have supposed to be quite out of the range of a few spots.

I have had measles myself, and was there—

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fore quite prepared to go on with my work. I was even looking forward to brightening the monotonous pallor of the children's complexions by painting in a pink rash, but I was not allowed to. Mrs. Merchant has a warm heart, and said that it would not be safe to trifle with illness. This means that instead of everything going on as usual, as it might quite well do, every one in the house has to run up and down stairs all day—except the hospital nurse, who stands just inside the child's door and heads the runners downstairs again.

It was suggested at first that I should go home for three weeks and then come back here, but instead of that I am staying with Mrs. Cambridge. I have forgotten why she asked me to come to her, or why I accepted. The last week has been like a dream, where one begins by salmon-fishing, and then suddenly finds oneself in a motor accident on the top of the Alps. The connecting links have faded.

Most of the Dons, or whatever their local

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equivalent is, live in a square round the University, which is a big building like a cross between an office and a church. I have told you that the Merchants' house is a mixed-looking erection ; the whole town is like that. The offices are half hotels, the churches suggest schools or offices, the private houses have borrowed a feature or two from dovecots, mausoleums, and even castles on the Rhine. The Town Hall has a compromising resemblance to the Stock Exchange, which, in its turn, is tricked out in what looks like pink gingham trimmings from the seaside lodging-houses. The Cambridges' house is designed for the greatest comfort of the few, and the greatest inconvenience of the many, the many being a large staff of maid-servants. All the rooms are beautifully large and airy, the stairs narrow and steep, the bedrooms infinitely removed from the apparatus by which they are kept clean. The kitchens are so remotely buried in the bowels of the earth that, even if the smell of boiled cabbage

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travelled as quickly as a ray of light, it would take, probably, some weeks to reach the noses of those fortunates engaged at meals in the dining-room.

I have already described the Cambridges to you. I should like to add that I am beginning to be very fond of the beetle-like Mr. Cambridge. As for her, it is a delight to see her handle the town. I never in my life saw such skill. Her "at-home" day makes me think of one of the days of creation—about the middle of the week—when huge lizards, giant toads, and queer-faced monstrosities of all sorts were being delivered by the million at the front door of Eden, and there was no one to show them what to do next. Mr. Cambridge would have made a bad Adam. He would have looked at them through his spectacles and said : " No, really, I can't think of a name for that fellow. Let's try this fat old girl. Let me see—h'm, ha ! "—(he gives his little old-maidish cough)—" er—Pobblyomniba Jessica perhaps——"

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"May I introduce Mrs. Blot?" Mrs. Cambridge would then have said in her quiet voice, and the matter would have been settled for all time, or until the Blots died out or were replaced by a more agile species, the Trots.



On her last Thursday I pinned myself into a corner behind the heaviest mammoth of the lot—a massive woman with a hairy face, and arms like a prize-fighter's legs. I have never recovered from my first alarm sufficiently to ask her name, but I have since gathered that she lives alone with a widowed nephew, and is at once the terror and delight of the junior staff of the University. People of strong character are not afraid of her, but the younger and less definite individuals

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cower before her, although her mighty hands shower sugar-plums, excellent dinner-parties, and the kindest advice upon them.

I was resting for a moment on an ottoman near the window when she sat down upon me, and looked about her through a pair of lorgnettes. Then she began to fan herself, and the motion which this gave to her body caused me such acute agony in my knees that I gave a faint scream, and, I think, moved a little. She looked round. I can't think how she did it—but, in fact, her face came quite close to the top of my head. I could feel her breath distinctly.

“God bless me!” she exclaimed. “It's a child! A young person! I beg your pardon most heartily, my dear child. I hope I have not injured you.”

“No, indeed, I don't think so,” I answered when I could speak. “I shall be quite all right in a minute.”

I gave her my seat, and was beginning to feel my legs again, when she said suddenly: “Do you live here? I see you are not

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wearing your hat." I explained all that I have told you, and she became very much interested. She said one especially amusing thing.

"I hope, my dear, that you don't paint still-life?"

I said that I didn't, because I dislike anything that sits still and looks heavy while I am working. "That's right, that's right," she said, patting my hand. "Now do you see that woman over there? Dirty creature! I believe she has come out again without washing her neck. She gave an exhibition of her work the other day; it seemed to me most deplorable. There was one picture in particular which really vexed me. A glass of water (a very ugly glass too—a common bedroom tumbler), a book (shamefully dog-eared), half a melon, and a boot that a scavenger might have been ashamed to wear, unlaced, and with a great bulging hole in the toe. I more than half suspect that she got it out of her husband's dressing-room, because that is the sort of woman she

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is. I was quite frank about it. 'No, my dear,' I said, 'I don't like it, and I'm not going to flatter you. Art is meant to ennoble us, and there is nothing ennobling about untidiness and sloth. If ever you see things of that sort about in your house, don't immortalize them—burn them. We don't want to recall such things. Don't even give them to the poor!'"

I longed for her to go on, but a disagreeable, boasting woman came up and laid a bold hand upon my mammoth. Such a woman has no excuse for braving danger, because, whichever place she goes to, she is bound to be unpleasantly situated when she dies. But to my great surprise, nothing happened; she was not trampled upon as I expected. In fact, any fool may tamper with these immense creatures, who very rarely exercise their strength. Their real anxiety is not to break anything, and the desire of their hearts is to inspire confidence.

I have seen the other woman—a brazen serpent in my opinion—at every house to

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which I have been lately. She seems to be an object of superstitious veneration in the town. Whether she ever did any good or cured people who had been bitten by adversity I do not know, but now she is nothing more than a fetish. Sometimes she shows a more active vulgarity, and mixes among us as an ordinary moral bounder, a sort of “’Arry” of the Christian religion. I have seen religious “Algerons,” too, more effete and less noisy, but this woman, when she is at her worst, clothes herself in virtue as though it were a loud check suit, and wears her blameless life like a buttonhole of dahlias.

Unfortunately she happened to catch sight of my mammoth, who was swaying in a leisurely manner above the heads of the crowd, and, thrusting aside her worshippers, she plunged across the room. She was full of some pompous, trivial rubbish about a churchwarden and a stained-glass window. “Of *course*, the dear Bishop would never find anything objectionable in it. They

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were all *Protestant* saints that we chose. John has been *most* particular on that point."

The wretched woman contrived to make a mess of the whole tea-party in about five minutes. Her brawling attracted other loiterers to the spot by the well-known dodge of the Park preacher. If you get on a chair in the Park, and in a high-pitched voice address the baby and perambulator that are nearest to you, and if you then rope in an errand boy, and two maiden ladies, and a tramp, you will soon have an audience that a prophet might be proud of. I don't think that she stood on a chair, but I know that she began with one harmless, deaf old lady whom she caught on the hearth-rug. When she was removed by an indulgent and busy husband, she left behind her the absurd impression that we had all been edified and improved. I meet her constantly, wherever we go, and her behaviour always reminds me of a temperance lecturer explaining lime-light views of a drunkard's liver to an assembly of school children. She assumes

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that every one in the audience is either drunk or likely to become drunk very soon if she is not there to interfere.

The mammoth stayed to dinner that evening, and I felt that for the moment chaos was over and the earth resting. She swept us all into our places with a gentle overpoweringness, and we knew at once just



where we were. The large animals nibbled their food, the small ones frisked about unharmed. If any of us wandered for a moment from the broad path of reason, the mammoth drove the offender back again into his place with irresistible common sense and kindness. Mr. Cambridge teased her because she goes to lectures.

“My dear professor,” she said, “I like to

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improve my mind. I was never educated as a girl, and I like to know what is going on. You young people know so much that I have never heard of. I should be sorry to go into another world having missed so much of what is to be seen in this one. The clergy are all very well : they mean excellently—I am a Churchwoman myself—but it seems to me that they spend too much time in laying plans for what can only be a visionary future, before they have mastered the wonders of our actual past and present. How can they fit their immortal souls for what is to come when they know so little of what has gone before ? Their ignorance is lamentable, if you consider that their object in life is to adapt us for association with beings of the highest intelligence.”

I said at dinner how much I disliked the woman whom I had met that afternoon, and when they understood from my description who she was, they all had so much to say that I disentangled the facts with great difficulty. I now understand that she

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has declared herself a sort of Queen of Morality in the town, and that her following consists of those who will believe anything that any one says so long as it is said loud enough and often enough.

This is a queer, self-conscious place. The people who inhabit it are neither living in a state of natural warfare, nor is there any domestic harmony between the species. They walk in the glaring publicity of a small community, and each says to the other, "I am I. Who are you? Well, that won't do at all; you must be somebody quite different, or I shan't like you." Mrs. Cambridge has something of the contemptuous nonchalance of a Persian cat, which is always sufficient unto itself, and would rather, almost, that the common herd were not cats, because their inclusion in her tribe would lower its exclusiveness. But my dear mammoth can never look on while a bird flies, or a mole burrows, or a squirrel leaps from bough to bough, but she must exclaim, "Bless my soul! What a splendid idea! I must learn

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to step more lightly, and to know more of the wonders of the underworld."

The city wives and the wives of the University may not see eye to eye, but they both have their value, and people like the mammoth (for there are others like her) provide a medium of common sense in which these two very different elements may combine for the benefit of what my chemist calls the "pill-swallowing public."

"Then, my dear, you ought to," says

the mammoth (so Mrs. Cambridge tells me), when some satin-coated Ichthyosaurus, spangled with diamonds, boasts that she has not made the acquaintance of a certain little



spoon-backed mouse with spectacles and a family. "She would do you a world of good. If you had to educate your own dear

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children as she has, you would have no idea how to set about it. And as for myself, I should be quite helpless without my *chef*. I could never learn to prepare a dinner equal to the one that she and her little maid cooked for me last week. Quite admirable, I assure you, and I am a greedy woman."

But last night she spoke with equal frankness on the other side. "You mustn't misunderstand dear Sarah Plummins," I heard her say to Mrs. Cambridge; "her kindness is beyond all description. She would give the clothes off her back—yes, I know what you are going to say, and it is very witty, and you shall not say it—she would give the clothes off her back to help a friend or an enemy, and say nothing about it. Her abrupt manner is just shyness. You see, I am shy myself, and I know how awkward it is to be thrown among people with ideas to which we are not used. But I don't mind your chaff, and I tell Sarah that she is to come and see your lovely collections,

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and take Mr. Cambridge out in her motor. It will do them both good."

I went to tea with Mrs. Merchant yesterday, just to see how the child was, and I asked her whether she knew the mammoth. She said that she had always been a little afraid of her. "Tom likes her," she said, speaking of her husband, "but she overpowers me sometimes." I said that she was like an oak among shrubs, and the literal creature reminded me that a moment ago I had called her a mammoth. Which did I mean? Mammoths were not a bit like oaks. I was cross, and replied, "Yes, they were, because they both had trunks," and she went shrieking off to "Tom" in his smoking-room, and said that I had made such a good joke, fit for *Punch*. I came back here before they had reached the inevitable sequel of a mammoth in a tight boot being like an oak because it is sure to have a-corn. By the way, I also mentioned the brazen serpent to Mrs. Merchant, who rose at once to my bait.

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“Oh, I am so glad you have come across her,” she exclaimed, “she is such a delightful woman !”

“Whom does she delight ?” I asked, determined to get at the bottom of this legend. “Not the police, I’ll be bound, for she takes the bread out of their mouths.”

“Oh, what nonsense,” said Mrs. Merchant. “Has she been scolding you ? I expect you deserved it.”

“Who first started the idea that she was anything in particular ?” I asked. “Did she tell you she was in the confidence of the angels ?—and, if so, can she produce any evidence of such favouritism ?”

I could get nothing more definite than the same vague rumours of her merit repeated again and again. It is evidently just as I thought. The idea has got about that she does a lot of good. I am inclined to put an advertisement in the local papers :

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SUSPECTED DISCOVERY OF A GIGANTIC SOCIAL HOAX

£5 reward to any man, woman or child, who will give satisfactory proof of having received moral, spiritual, or financial benefit at any time from the well-known society leader, Mrs. Evangelette de Rougemont (or whatever her name is).

I believe that the mammoth would provide funds for a commission to investigate the whole matter, if she were persuaded that it were for the good of the town. Most probably, though, she would do nothing of the sort. She would say that we all stand in need of improvement, and that a borrowed twopenny dip strapped to the back of a blind weasel may be tiresome and even dangerous in society, but it all helps to keep up the idea that there is a good fire burning somewhere. I can imagine her saying it with perfect conviction.

Yours ever,
GEORGINA.

CHAPTER XVIII

UNIVERSITY SQUARE, MILLPORT.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—I am still hard at it and shall probably be here for ages. No more of the Merchants' children got measles, and he is so pleased with his portrait that I am to begin on his wife's when I go back to Longmoor tomorrow. I have so enjoyed being with the Cambridges, and shall miss the peace of being able to Be or not to Be, as I like, without complications. I once read a medical book called, "My System of Elimination," and it seemed to me the simplest possible cure for all evils. If any one would eliminate from the recollections of the Millport belles everything that they have seen without seeing and heard without understanding they would be so nice ; really nice dears. But it makes them so fussy and nervous to masquerade as delicately bred, and intuitive, and things of that sort, when

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they are bound to be found out by even the most weevily specimens of the real article.

I have been helping Mrs. Cambridge to sell at a bazaar, where the special form of masquerade practised was "smart setting." I do wish you could have seen Mrs. Bushytail being a duchess; the kind of duchess that you get in newspaper feuilletons and cheap Sunday stories—stout, short-sighted, crisp, impertinent, and great friends with the well-bred young girl who is not afraid of her.

Each of the stalls was presided over by a peeress of some sort, and "with her," as the bazaar notices said, were two or three of the fattest flowers of Millport. They were all as nervous as lambs at Easter. Even Mrs. County's beautiful pale face was hot, and her dress looked tight, although it was one of the new, very sloppy kind. Her particular Marchioness had on a dress of just the same shape, and it looked as if she had been to bed in it for years and yet had managed to keep it quite fresh, because she was so

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self-possessed that none of her ever came through her skin. Mrs. County's garment was equally loose, but it looked about as convincing as a Greek dress does on a school-mistress in three pairs of combinations and a lamb's-wool bodice. Mrs. County never gets flurried like this except when she is masquerading—well—like the dickens.

Mrs. Bushytail's stall belonged to a duchess who didn't turn up ; so although for some hours Mrs. Bushytail, like good dog Tray, grew very red, and would have growled and bit her till she bled, had she happened on the duchess just then, yet, when the first shock was over, she began, like a sensible woman, to count her blessings. She soon discovered several. One was that she would be able to run the stall as she liked, and bully every one else as the duchess might have bullied her. Another substantial blessing was that strangers coming round to the stall would probably mistake her for the duchess. It must have been after the discovery of this second blessing that I

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caught her pretending to be short-sighted and peering at people in a supercilious way. Her expression suddenly reminded me of a cook we once had who was not quite sober, and that finished it ! I had to go back to my stall and hiccup in lonely pleasure, for I did not dare to show Mrs. Cambridge ; she exaggerates sometimes.

We were one of thirteen stalls who were all selling what you might class together under the head of "mats." Mats (by which I mean embroidery on things that are not of much use to anybody) are the special industry which the bazaar was laying itself out to promote. They are made by the natives of some island in the Archipelago where Mrs. County's boss-marchioness's husband has some land ; she says that the natives are very poor, and that she is going to try and get our Government to do something for them. The bazaar was to help to make the industry known. One of the other three stalls sold native tobacco, one Home Produce (that is, all sorts of eatables and

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uneatables), and the third sold books about the Industry. The boss-marchioness got some one to go out to the islands and paint pictures of the country, and her husband is building a big hotel there, and is going to run it himself. It will be a sort of paying house-party, with golf and mixed bathing and gambling, and all sorts of games, and cost a good deal to go to. You can imagine the whole gang exploiting the ladies of Millport. If you had only seen Mrs. Bushytail sitting so happily in her trap, shelling out pounds and pounds for the privilege of looking short-sighted and *de haut en bas*! Her three daughters—really nice girls of eighteen to twenty-five—were there, taking it all as innocently as puppies take it when their mother does tricks for a piece of cake. Mrs. Merchant, as good as gold, had another stall of mats, and I helped between her and Mrs. Cambridge. Our marchioness (I forget who she was) didn't turn up either; and Mrs. Merchant had Lady Lacey, who is a Quaker and wouldn't

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hurt a fly, so none of us had to pretend to be tired, or deaf, or immoral, or any of the things that Mrs. County and the others were playing at.

I think that the natives would have been amused if they had seen who bought their things, and why. Of course the Millport ladies are very, very kind; you must never lose sight of that for a moment. They have all—or most of them, at any rate—"come through" a good lot themselves in the way of ordinary domestic care. They live nearer to the workings of their houses than one would suppose from their wealth. They keep comparatively few servants, and those they have stand in a very human relation to their masters. The angry butlers and huffy parlourmaids, who are so confident about what is "done in the best houses," are often quite as devoted as any aged Highland retainer to be found in literature. This means that the Bushytails and Countys, if they would only leave off being so absurd, have lots of stuffing in them. It is the non-

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sense on the top of the stuffing that makes Mrs. Bushytail look so tight. I have wandered off from what I meant to say, which was that they have great sympathy with any form of work, and they were really much keener about the natives than were most of the marchionesses, who, on the whole, looked as if all they asked was to be taken "back to Dixie" and their illicit unions. Most likely they are all as virtuous as Penelope, and the loose-living, passionate doll expression that they all have is as much a pose with them as it is with Mrs. County when she imitates it. I have seen really good young girls do it right up to a tennis-net, until they became busy and forgot.

We all did a roaring trade. Mrs. Cambridge made up for her lack of a marchioness by her own talent for making people do what she wants. You know the sort of old wretches who haunt bazaars? I do not know whether the number of them accounts for the bulk of the money raised, or whether they are more nuisance than they are

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financially worth. It is certain that they don't spend much individually. But then a horde of locusts lay a field bare very quickly ; so, owing to their numbers, they may be valuable, though I have grave doubts. Anyhow, you know them, don't you ? With long lines down the sides of their mouths, and snuffy green coats and skirts, and hats like one's morning tea-tray, with one cup, a little jug, and some bread-and-butter on it. Mrs. Cambridge catches them with her eye, and then begins to arrange the most offensive things on her stall. The prey she intends to catch always loves any appliances for discomfort : cosies to make the good tea strong and bitter and horrible ; or useless objects with a picture of a detestable cock making noises to wake every one up ; or garments—but we can't go into that. These old ladies make me shiver and feel grey, like an eclipse of the sun does ; and I remember all sorts of depressing things, such as hair in brushes. They seem to bring these suggestions with them, and to be searching for

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horrors. They are the scavengers of every bazaar, and are really a very morbid class, I believe.

Myself I can do nothing with them, but Mrs. Cambridge is as impervious to sentiment as they are, and equally obstinate ; and having her mental powers in more efficient order than theirs, she generally gets rid of more than they intended to buy—and they have to be nice about it, too, or they don't get the things.

I enjoyed seeing Lady Claneustrigge, at the next stall, in the grip of one of these scavengers. The wretch had been to us for toast-warmers (I think she called them), and we had not got any.

“ Toast-warmers ? ” said Lady Claneustrigge helplessly, looking about her. “ Have we any toast-warmers, Mrs. Trotter ? ”

Mrs. Ritz-Trotter hurried up, all smiles, and took possession of Mrs. Cambridge's lost prey.

“ No, I am afraid not,” she said ; “ I don't think that the natives, you see, *use* so

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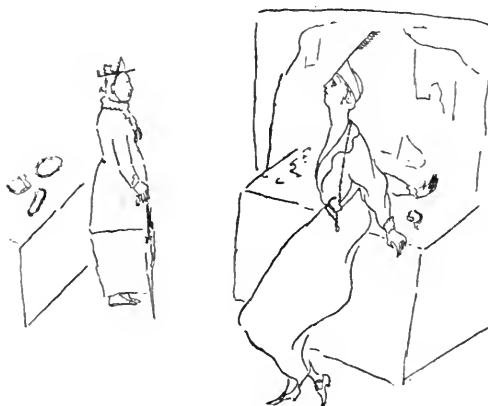
much toast as we do. They live on a peculiar sort of bread which they carry next the skin, in these bags—aren't they quaint? Two-and-six. Not at *all* dear, are they?"

The prey waved her aside without ceremony, and ran her experienced, mauve eyes up and down Lady Claneustrigge in silence

—the sort of silence there is at whist.

"Have you any handkerchiefshams?" she asked at last.

Lady Claneustrigge backed nervously down the stall, and then lost her head altogether. "This is it, isn't it?" she stammered, shaking out a yellow table-centre embroidered in shells. "They work beautifully, don't they?" she added, with a smile of obvious fear and mistrust.



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"It is quite worth helping them, isn't it, to make such lovely things? It is such a splendid industry."

"I said handkerchief-shams," said the prey in her flat, patient tone, "that's a table-centre; my table wouldn't hold that."

"It wouldn't do for a wedding present for Lizzie, would it, auntie?" whispered a kindly girl who came with her.

"Wouldn't stand wear," said the prey tersely.

"I am afraid we have none of those things just *now*," Mrs. Ritz-Trotter said, throwing a protecting arm across Lady Claneustrigge, who looked on the verge of tears under this inexplicable form of torture. "You see, in those hot countries the natives take such *light* breakfasts of fruit, and so on, that they hardly understand our home comforts. But I expect they could easily be taught to make them, couldn't they, Lady Claneustrigge?"

A grateful nod and incoherent assurances. You must remember that the mauve eyes

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had never ceased their travelling, up and down, up and down, taking in every detail ; sucking it in, absorbing every knot, every jewel, as though it were some harmful, irresistible drug.

“ I’ll take one of those,” she said at last, pointing to a small purse of shells marked one-and-ninepence. I know, as surely as a mother knows what a baby will do with a pot of jam, that the woman took the purse home and put it on the dressing-table of her spare room, and that her frost-bitten guests put hair in it on every day of their critical, ungrateful visits.

“ Very tahrsome, isn’t it, explaining to those sort of people ? ” was apparently the last word that Mrs. County would ever have the energy to pronounce, as she passed our stall with the preoccupation of a woman of ten thousand worlds.

I wonder how I shall paint Mrs. Merchant to-morrow. She wants me to do a thing in a white satin evening dress, sitting on a sofa, or standing up near a doorway, or just

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looking intelligent and ladylike on canvas, with a dark background and a light forehead. I can't paint her as I should like at the head of a breakfast table, feeding all the little Merchants with Force out of a packet with the label on, or in a nightgown and a fur coat, with her hair down, and flames all over the back of the picture.

She has a beautiful character, and if only they had not frightened her as a little girl, no one could have been more charming. They began by telling her how easily shocked the angels were, and that there could be no moments of indulgence in moral carpet slippers and dressing-gown, because the angels never went down (or up) for meals, or even to fetch a handkerchief. They were "there all the while," like the gentleman at the famous siege, and they were shocked if children did practically anything that their elders do. Later in life the boggy held over her head was what "people" would say. The angels apparently don't concern themselves with any

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one over half-fare age. When she turned twelve they dropped off, and that vague creature "people" took on the job. You can imagine "people" buttoning on his uniform and taking over the name, age, and previous record of the young sufferer. Do you remember how you exploded the idea of "people" when we were at school?



You walked down a whole street with your tongue out, and I ate peas with my knife at a restaurant, and no one said anything.

You went home and told your mother that if "people" were ever going to say anything, now was the time to do it, and you didn't believe that there were any "people" at all. Mrs. Merchant still "goes by what people say" a good deal, and I sometimes find it difficult to talk to her on this account.

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There is a "people" deposit left on her mind, which has to be scraped off before one can see what she is like. She and her husband came to supper at the Cambridges' last Sunday, and after supper, when the men were downstairs smoking, we got on the subject of religion.

In that respect Mrs. Merchant does not altogether "go by what people say." She goes by it for a time, and gets over a good many difficult bits with its assistance, but when it comes to plain ethics she does as she likes.

"I don't think that bazaars are very nice, do you?" she asked Mrs. Cambridge. "People seem to like them very much, but I think it would be nicer if we all sent the money to the Archipelago if they really want it there, or if the natives' work were introduced at some shop we could buy it if we wanted to. People did stare so at the stall holders, didn't they?"

This gave me an idea. Suppose that "people," who say all the horrible things

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that frighten us, are the ghoulisn ladies who buy receptacles for hair ! Suppose that they go about dressed like that because they are detectives (if you come to think of it they never look as if they had any legitimate business of their own to mind), and that after a visit from one of them this or that information "gets about," "people are saying it," etc. If I had thought for a moment when I was at the bazaar that I had run down my lifelong enemy, I should have taken a revolver and sacrificed myself for the good of humanity by shooting the lot of them dead and taking the consequences.

Then those two got on ethics in general. Mrs. Cambridge never goes by what people say, but she seems to incorporate their remarks with her own experience, and out of the two together makes a very serviceable guide which takes her down paths pleasant to herself and agreeable to her neighbours.

"Oh, I think most likely the Old Testament is true," I heard Mrs. Merchant

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saying when next I caught them up. "At least people say that it is all quite possible if you think what conjurers do—and the East and all that: and even part of the New as well, it is possible—" but that was getting a little uncomfortable, and her voice died away in a self-reproving silence. "But I think," she went on with apparent irrelevance, "that the clergy might be more strict in how they teach us to behave; they are a little vague, don't you think?" "I don't think they know themselves what they want," was Mrs. Cambridge's opinion.

"Oh, don't you? Perhaps that is it," said my dear innocent. "I am quite sure that if instead of taking the text we had to-day, 'And Israel set liars in wait round about Gibeah,' and just telling us that we ought to take a strong line against slackness in the education of our children—if, instead, they had said to us, 'You mustn't be hypocrites with your children and pretend that God makes one law for you and another for them——'"

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“That we have the entrée to heaven, in fact, while they have to go round by the front and take the risk of being turned back,” suggested Mrs. Cambridge.

“And if they had said, ‘You must stop that everlasting talk about what other people ought to do, either as regards your children or your friends, and you must forget yourself when you want to be nice to people, and remember yourself when you want to be nasty to them——’”

This was too much for Mrs. Cambridge ; it made her laugh, and Mrs. Merchant began to drink her coffee, which was quite cold, and the men came upstairs. Mrs. Cambridge, who is devoted to Mrs. Merchant, gave their husbands an outline of what had been going on. They took it up, but we had to stop them almost at once, because they left the nice personal line and began philosophizing and generalizing. It made us all yawn and get tired about the eyes. If they had really let themselves go and had told us what frauds public men are, and

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what their platform tears amount to in private, or if they had given us practical instances, in strict confidence (we were all among friends), it would have been so pleasant. But you never can bring men down to facts. Their conversation is a perpetual vague laying down of the law for everybody, and never following it by anybody year in and year out. I like getting at people individually, and then offering myself for a jab in return, don't you ?

Yours ever,

GEORGINA.

CHAPTER XIX

“LONGMOOR,” MILLPORT.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—We have just come back from a wedding ; the wedding of Miss Darling and Mr. Friseur. You remember, he is the young man I told you about at the first dinner-party. It seems such a long time ago since I first came here portrait-painting. I am getting so fond of them all that I believe I shall think you rather drunk and disorderly when I come back. The extraordinary innocence of every one amazes me. Most of them are as good as gold (nice refined gold with enough alloy in it to stand hard wear, and really quite good enough for all one wants). Perhaps they are innocent because they live within a short distance of the country, which makes them healthy and not morbidly civilized, and on the other hand, rumours of the Court and fashion filter through to them

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quite rapidly, which prevents them from relapsing easily into bucolic vices.

Miss Darling's wedding was about as flat and comfortable and sensible a proceeding as you could well imagine. No passion in it to lead to possible disappointment and disaster ; no marrying for money or position, as they are both already comfortably seated on the top branch of their social tree, and both have about the same amount of money, enough for perfect ease and to cover sudden emergencies, but not enough to lead to riotous living. Miss Darling loves everybody, so it is not likely that she will leave out her husband. Mr. Friseur loves himself chiefly, therefore, having chosen a wife, there is nothing to tempt him to ask for any other lady. If you like gooseberry-fool better than any other dish and are already eating gooseberry-fool, you don't bother about the relative value of the other dishes on the table. You may need a biscuit of some sort to bring out the flavour of your choice, and Mr. Friseur has chosen Miss

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Darling to be his biscuit, so that he may enjoy himself more. But the other women may leave the world so far as he is concerned ; his interest in the meal is at an end.

We had an early lunch, and got off afterwards in a great hurry. The coffee was late and too hot to drink. Our hair did not go so well as it did the last time we wore the same hat, and our gloves were a little tight, which made us flushed. It is only at a wedding that these *contretemps* happen ; one can get to any other sort of party quite calmly. It is all such a self-conscious ceremony from beginning to end. The crowd by the awning leading to the church seems to have one gigantic eye fixed on the first leg one puts to the ground in getting out of the motor. When it is a motor I can just bear the ordeal, as the step is broad and low, but when I have to shuffle out of a cab, and hit just the right spot on which to plant my toe, the eye of the crowd slays my ease for the rest of the day. "Eh, look !

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h'm"—says the eye, and off I go up the red carpet, thoroughly flushed, and with my dress up to the knees on one side and a tail of chiffon dragging in the mud at the other. I find this out when I get home, and the mark always shows afterwards. The church, again, is all eyes. Every one has been there for hours, in a state of acute observation. The young gentlemen with shiny hair and buttonholes don't mind this much. Boys are more or less uncomfortable anywhere in society, and have to be brave about it, so this is not worse than any ordinary party. Besides, it takes them all their time to remember the things they have been told to do; to see that the right people get seats beyond the cord, and so on. We were just short of the cord and in a perfect nest of acquaintances. I saw Mrs. Bushytail and Mrs. County, and Mrs. Cambridge was tucked away comfortably under the lee of the mammoth, who sat down upon me that afternoon I told you about. The brazen serpent was also there, looking about her

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through a lorgnette. She is very religious, and therefore behaves in a church as if she were very much at home, and could sit in all the pews at once if she liked. She reminds me of a person one always meets on a sea voyage, who wears a yachting cap and examines the wheel and the barometer, and counts the knots at breakfast. I once met one who was seasick, and I was so pleased. I should love it if an angel came into the church and didn't recognize the brazen serpent, and she had to explain who she was. She was taking charge of the whole wedding. I wish I had been sitting next to her ! I should have tried to put on a face like G. P. Huntley's, and drawled, " Oh, that's the bride, is it ? What'll they do with her, now ? Oh, do they ? Very nice, yes. Who's the old fellow dressed up in calico, what ? Vicar—Ah, quite so, yes, very nice. Cuts the cake and finds a ring and a sixpence in it, doesn't he ? Yaas, thanks—what a lot you know about it ! "

Miss Darling is, as I have told you, a

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velvet-hearted creature, and no doubt the life she is to lead will give her more opportunity of cultivating her good qualities than if she were marrying any one with intelligence enough to be a connoisseur in velvet. Mr. Friseur will know how to keep himself warm with the velvet, but that is all ; he cares nothing for quality or light and shade.

Bridesmaids always look their worst, don't they ? whereas brides just look queer. Very often brides are persons rarely visited by emotion. But on that day they have an idea that emotion is not only natural, but necessary ; it would be an opportunity missed if they did not have some then. So they either fish a little out of the pockets of their own consciousness, or they borrow some from friends and relations, who are all ready to contribute for the occasion. "It is quite right that dear Emily should be upset," they say ; so dear Emily manages somehow to get a little upset, and looks it, and the guests revel in her indisposition. Her red nose and trembling hand have the

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same luscious, nutritive quality for the wedding-guests as the implements of a murder or other work of the emotions have for the unemployed. People who are themselves sensitive to the varying weather of the passions are usually eager to keep those whom they love as warm and sheltered as may be when a storm threatens, but those who habitually lead the sheltered life like nothing better than to stare out of the windows at their friends who are being buffeted about in the gale.

Miss Darling, however, was not out in any storm. She walked to the altar as to a new plateau in an altogether agreeable country, where her Friseur figures as a picturesque object for the devotion which she lavishes on every human creature within her reach. He will need to beat her very hard indeed before she takes a dislike to him. But to go back to the bridesmaids. They were not queer, like the bride ; they were just sticky, and they were suffering as we had suffered about our hair. I don't

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know which of them were the worst—those who had done their own hair with trembling fingers, or those who had got in a man and had it waved. They were as solemn and self-conscious as a stuffed owl that tries to look natural with its foot on a real egg which has, unfortunately, been blown previously. Miss Darling's awful father (as they described him in the hymn, with unnecessary rudeness, I thought) looked really detestable in a white waistcoat and spats, and a pink skin head. Men, when



they get to that age, look so much better if they have been exposed to the weather a good deal. I should think that Mr. Darling had been kept too warm, and given too soft food. All the slyness and cupidity and harshness, which may be quite dignified when they form a horny skin over a heart full of natural fire,

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are in his case just spongy and unpleasant indications of general rottenness. I don't think that Miss Darling has a mother, but the bridegroom's was there—a bad woman, I should think, from the look of her: thick-skinned, over-dressed, and with short legs, which are always a sign of doubtful virtue. I don't think that her son drinks; in fact, I am sure he does not; but she is the type of woman who schemes indefatigably to find a good young girl to marry her drunken blackguard of a son in the hope of keeping him straight. The bridegroom looked like the man who takes the leading part in that wearisome type of play where the old men are fossils, the young men are nonentities, the elder women are saints, and all are marshalled into a ritual of self-revelation by a girl of eighteen, who has sown some fairly commonplace wild oats. Well, that is all over, and they have gone off to the Riviera to listen to the Voice that breathed o'er Eden.

I spent the evening helping Mrs. Merchant

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with the accounts of a ball which she is getting up for her favourite hospital. Wherever one goes in this town, some one is doing something for his neighbour, or, rather, for an organized section of his neighbours. There is any amount of kindness to be had, but very little pleasure. There are parties—any number of parties—for all classes of society (the kind creatures give parties for the poor and for themselves), where the only practical difference is in the quality of the refreshments ; but I have seen very little happiness since I came. People like everything very much, and it is all most enjoyable, but I have not seen any one make any attempt to jump over the moon. In fact, if a scheme were got up for hoisting the public over the moon, a good many would take advantage of it. And then, by and by, the lift would get crowded with the wrong sort of people, who smell and make a noise, so the parties would be discontinued. Probably by that time some bright spirit would have begun organizing trips to hell, and it would be so

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interesting getting special asbestos clothes to wear going down.

Last week I went with Mrs. Merchant to her hospital. It was her day for visiting there, and we also met Mrs. Bushytail going her rounds. She looked tremendously fat—fatter than usual—and was simply all over the place as regarded management.

“Well, now, how are you getting on, Mrs. Tibby?” I heard her ask at one bedside.

Poor Mrs. Tibby looked at death’s door, but I believe she had a lurking instinct that it would be as much as her place in bed was worth if she were not found to be getting on nicely, so she made a weak profession of well-being, and lay patiently awaiting what might come.

“That’s capital!” said Mrs. Bushytail. “Capital! Such a pleasant day, isn’t it?”

Mrs. Tibby, who, by the way, had been taken to pieces like a clock only a day or two before, would, I think, have privately described the day as something a little short

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of pleasant ; but you never know. I have met before now Mrs. Tibbys who found pleasure in sermons, in strong tea with sugar in it, in a visit from a lady, in a crochet petticoat, in all sorts of queer things, in fact, so perhaps she found disintegration pleasant.



“We all have to be thankful if we have our health, ma’am,” she observed.

“Quite so,” agreed Mrs. Bushytail. “And you are going to have yours now, Mrs. Tibby, and go back to your dear husband, and be able to take up all your duties again as fresh as ever. I never feel half myself if I can’t get about and attend to my house, and I’m sure you feel the same.”

I had a private vision of Mr. Tibby as the forlorn husband trying to decide whether

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the herring should be made into a soufflé, or served on toast as a savoury in the evening, or, perhaps, remembering to speak to the milkman, and write to the rent-collector. It would be a nice little occupation for Mrs. Tibby to take over the household again. These little tasks prevent us from dwelling on ourselves.

“And what are you going to do when you come out?” my fat friend asked a young girl with a deformed body and a face like clay. “You must look on the bright side, and not think of yourself, you know, or you will never get well.”

The girl smiled a feeble smile and twiddled the bedclothes.

“There’s plenty of work to be got,” the excellent lady continued, “if you apply in the right quarter. Everything is so splendidly managed nowadays that nobody need be out of work if they don’t want to. And it will be delightful—won’t it?—to think you are earning your own living and putting by a little for a rainy day. The great thing

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is to be thrifty and avoid spending money on things you don't want. I am sure you must be very grateful for all the care that has been taken of you in this terrible illness. Yes, I am sure you are; that's right. Always be grateful and happy, and you will never want. Now I am going to leave these flowers just where you can see them, and then I must be off. There are so many poor things like you, you know, who have to be cheered up. Good-bye—good-bye, Mrs. Tibby. Hope you will have a splendid night and be about again directly."

I was so entranced by Mrs. Bushytail's vigour and excellence that I forgot about Mrs. Merchant, who had in the meantime been quietly rambling through the wards, timidly passing the time for the patients one by one. She is not a vital person, and she is very shy, but they watched her with the idle, restful pleasure which, when one is ill, a cat performing its simple toilet may afford without raising one's temperature.

JOKING APART

I was left to my own resources, and felt most grateful when a thin, wiry little woman addressed me from the end bed.

"Nice change in the weather, isn't it, Miss?" she said.

We exchanged a few comments on the uncertain habits of the sun, and then she said, with considerable feeling, "My! I'll be glad to be about again. I'll be out next week if all's well, and I'm just going to enjoy meself a bit."

"How?" I asked.

"I'll be out a bit of an evening and get to one of the 'alls, perhaps. Do you care for them places, Miss?"

"I love them," I assured her, feeling as if a great weight of care had been lifted from my chest. "Bert Hoskyn is coming this week, I know, and I wish I were going to see him."

"Is he, indeed, Miss?" she said politely. "I don't know his name exactly, but there's many of them that's grand. I'll take a good look round next week, and maybe see

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the one you mention. You do get a bit down-'earted lyin' 'ere with nothing to think of all day, without it's the nurses or the food or your own inside. I'd show you the place, and welcome, where they stitched me up, Miss, but maybe nurse wouldn't like it."

"No," I said, "I am sure she wouldn't like you to disturb it ; but you must show me some other time, if I meet you again."

"That I will, Miss," she promised heartily. "Any time you're passing. Do you come far from 'ere ?"

Mrs. Merchant took me home before our conversation got more interesting, but I came away refreshed and with a feeling that pleasure is not dead as I had suspected during the last few weeks. After all, pleasure to be any good must be something that sprouts in one's own senses, and may be called to life by anything. The Millport idea of it is something of which you buy from a purveyor as much as you can afford, and

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then you pour it over yourself and other people. It rather deadens the spontaneous kind.

Good-bye,

Yours ever,

GEORGINA.

CHAPTER XX

“LONGMOOR,” MILLPORT.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—This day week will see me back. The portraits are finished. I huddled them all on to one canvas at last—all, at least, except papa. The children would not sit still without mamma, and mamma had a sort of unemployed, forcible idleness look about her without the children, so there they are. I won't bore you by telling you any more about the pictures. I have told you about the people themselves, and if you don't see their portraits in your mind's eye it is owing to your slowness in the uptake.

My last experience in Millport has amused me as much as any. I had a whole day with Mrs. County, and I have not yet quite got back my power of moving naturally. Mrs. Merchant had to go last week to the other end of Cheddar to do some good work or other—sit on a Board or in a Chair, or

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something—and suggested that I should go with her for the run. Mrs. County, who, by the way, lives farther away than I thought, would give me luncheon, and had asked me to stay until the car picked me up again on its way home.

We motored miles and miles through something that certainly is not country, though neither is it town, sea, desert, or icefloe. Perhaps it is just arable land ; I had not thought of that before. It looks like acres of brown paper, slightly wrinkled, and marked into irregular shapes by lines of the mixed rubbish that a bird makes its nest of. The dusty road runs alongside of these lines of dusty twigs and straw and rags, and every few minutes we passed a house built either of red brick or of that white mud that has had gravel thrown at it. Exasperating houses, planned often in imitation of a farmhouse with some cut about it, only, unfortunately, the builders have copied all the details and left out all the point. Any details they liked have been exaggerated,

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such as sloping roofs, odd levels, inconvenient entrances. These houses are the nurseries of Millport. Here the married sons and daughters live after they have left papa's luxurious nest on the outskirts of his business, and before they have developed into full-blown county specimens, with a hunting stable and the supreme terror of all forms of discomfort, mental and physical.

In the eye of God I believe the last state of that man to be worse than the first, and that the middle state partakes of the vices and virtues of both. Papa is often self-made, but whether he has made himself bad or good, still he has done it in the way he likes, and often in fighting other people he develops a *flair* for sincerity like that of a pig for truffles. The young people in the nurseries, having papa's enthusiasm for progress without his gouty rigidity, are sometimes a little priggish, but more often they are generous and amusing. They have a great many babies, and work hard and keep young a long time. Apollyon waits for

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them farther afield. If they escape his clutches they may come out top among the angels, but he manages to catch quite enough of them to keep him strong and active. When he catches them he imbues them with an almighty terror of the word "it." They become "it's" slave. Any trifle may involve them in the shame of not being quite "it" (in my mother's time people called it "the thing"), and yet no one can tell them where "it" lurks; every one has to find out for himself. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou find 'it,'" says Apollyon, and they never know a moment's peace after that.

I was left for a few minutes alone in the drawing-room before Mrs. County came down. Her drawing-room is pretty, and smells delicious. No human being could work, or, I should think, live, in a room like that, but it is as pretty as a skilful conjuring trick. If one looked carefully at any detail of it, its charm was gone. I could imagine any number of cats feeling at home in it, because all its chairs are

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luxurious, and, apart from bodily luxury, a cat's whole creed is negation and denial.

Presently the door opened and a lovely creature came in. The butler looked round the room and said: "Mrs. County will be down directly, ma'am." She was just like Mrs. County, except that all her features turned a little down instead of a little up. Even her eyelids were nearly closed, whereas Mrs. County's are nearly always turned up, with an appealing expression, as though she were about to join the angels but was too tired to make the first move.

I find it so difficult to observe by-laws, such as ignoring people unless one knows them. I should have chatted to this weary Wilhelmina if I had thought that there was a chance of her answering, but I had an instinct that she would partially raise one eyelid at me and pretend to be either a dying empress or a virtuous barmaid accosted in Piccadilly under a misapprehension. I therefore looked down my nose too, and said nothing.

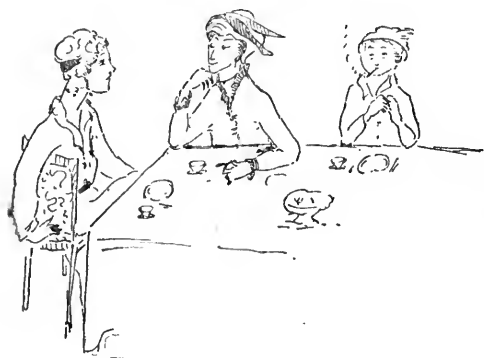
JOKING APART

Mrs. County, of course, introduced us when she came down. The other one's name was really Mrs. Smith, and that in itself is disguise enough, so I need not invent one for her. She had a deep, rich voice, full of good food and the health which comes from taking plenty of exercise, and letting every one else do everything except what every one wants to do. That

you make haste to do yourself, with carefully concealed greed.

They were very entertaining. First they licked one another all over — “Darling, such a lovely hat!

m'm—m'm. You do always manage to get hold of such wonderful things!” Then one or other got a little playful pat on the ear—“*Yours*, darling; he never was mine; nothing to do with me. I'm absolutely out



GEORGINA BROWN

of it." Then a swift retreat—"Lola ought to be more careful, shouldn't she? I mean, it's too pitiful running after any one like that!"

We went in to lunch, and they purred together over the good food. Now and then they left for a moment their absorbing occupation of the preliminaries of battle while they took a detour round me. They had to do this for the sake of politeness, but they were both quite pleased to prolong their delights by a little diversion in between. Mrs. County brought Mrs. Merchant's name in her mouth, and laid it before us as a morsel to worry. Being, more or less, in charge of it for the moment, I was able to slip it into my pocket and substitute a mixed variety of their Millport acquaintances. All of these they pretended to know in the slightest possible degree, they having now crossed the Rubicon between Millport and the County, and burned their sauce-boats (you know, don't you, that this is the great ketchup country? You pass whole fields of it when you come through by train).

Y O K I N G A P A R T

“Funny little place, Millport, isn’t it?” said Mrs. Smith. “I never could stand it when I was there. We’re having a party of natives next week; will you come, Rita, and help? I shan’t know what to do with them.”

“What sort of natives?” asked Mrs. County.

“Oh, you know the freaks Sam collects in Millport. He says we should not have any money if we weren’t civil to them.”

“It gives one such an insight into what the King and Queen must feel at Drawing-rooms, doesn’t it?” I suggested.

“I don’t quite see what you mean,” Mrs. Smith said, screwing up her eyes at me with elaborate attention. I explained that my cook’s sister was lady’s maid to one of the Queen’s ladies-in-waiting, and that she used to describe the fun that was often made, behind the scenes, of some of us middle-class people who go to the Drawing-rooms. Of course, they never suggested that the King and Queen made fun of their subjects

GEORGINA BROWN

—for, naturally, they wouldn't ; but some of those quite near the Throne did sometimes.

“ You get all the best of the fun here,” I added, “ because you see it from both points of view. Of course, the class below ours get it when they snub the tradespeople and then get snubbed by us ; but the top dogs can only get one side of it all the time, until, perhaps, they go to heaven.

Do you think that the Beasts who are described in the Book of Revelation will snub the ladies-in-waiting then ? ”

“ I don't know, I'm sure,” said Mrs. Smith coldly.

Mrs. County giggled, and, I thought, looked gratefully at me, as if I had been trying to score a point for her, which really hadn't entered my mind. I was pursuing



JOKING APART

my own thoughts entirely. A great many people came over for tennis in the afternoon. Such a lot of cackling went on, but very languid cackling, like sick hens. At first it all seemed to consist of, "Now then, Hartley! Here, Lola! Where's Bob? Teddy, have you got the balls? Will you take Emma? All right, take Lola then; it doesn't matter which. Now then, Bob! Where's Hartley? Lola, have you got the balls? Here, Teddy!" And then the same all mixed up again in a different way. But by and by, when they began to play, I became conscious again of the awful, cold shadow of fear that seems always upon them. Fear of losing some man's allegiance. Fear of a husband discovering that a man's allegiance is coveted. Fear of all their friends not knowing that there is any man's allegiance for the husband to be prevented from discovering. Fear that there may be allegiance of greater social value which is being offered to some one else. Their life is like that fatiguing game called Demon

G E O R G I N A B R O W N

Patience, where everybody tries to be the first to put the next card on six different heaps at once. I felt that Mrs. County and Mrs. Smith, and all the rest of them, were watching with the most practised rapidity of glance to see where a rival was going to plant a new *dernier cri*, whether in clothes, tricks of speech, paramours, or accomplishments of any kind. I longed to become a Yogi : to turn in my tongue, and sit motionless under a tree for a thousand hours and observe the slow processes of Nature.

When Mrs. Merchant came to fetch me I could have thrown myself into her arms. She is as simple as the day, and as dull as ditch-water (a clean ditch with clear water in it and rare ferns growing on the banks), and as pretty as a picture (a chromolithograph of an amiable and beautiful lady), and as wise as an owl which knows that the tree it lives in is hollow and prefers it that way, and as harmless as a dove whom I have been brutally making into pigeon-pie for your delight, but really that

JOKING APART

you may the better appreciate her full use and beauty. I should like to explain this to her if there were any chance of her ever coming across these letters ; to tell her that we love

*First when we see them roasted, biras we
have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see.*

We left Hartley and Emma and Lola and all of them hard at work, evaporating—metabolizing—rather than playing or doing anything else. Their existence seems to be continued by a succession of little explosions, when they leave off one habit and begin another. Some one, I suppose Mrs. County, had been rash enough to tell them that I belong to the professional classes. That set them off exploding like little bombs all round. “By Jove !” “You don’t say so !” “Dear me !” “Artists and those queer kind of beggars !” “Ever meet So-and-so ? He painted my missis and we had the time of our lives,” etc.

GEORGINA BROWN

Have you ever, in a big hotel where an orchestra played after dinner, noticed the faces listening to the music? Sometimes in those orchestras there are men who can play. I have seen some of our brothers saying in their inner consciousness, and almost unknown to the part of their minds which they are using at the moment, "Queer beggars, by Jove! makin' chunes and fiddlin' away there. Curious sort of life it must be workin' a stick up and down on a string made out of some



por brute's inside! wonderful how they manage to keep it up—La da, da de da, pretty little thing that. Tomkins is a deuced shrewd feller the way he handled that contract—" and their thoughts go wandering off again. So I have wandered off myself; but

J O K I N G A P A R T

this pigeon-holing of people is a habit I have learned here for the first time. I never knew before how much you and I pigeon-holed merchants and their kind as miserly and uneducated persons, just as they pigeon-hole us as queer beggars with eccentric hair and polygamous habits. When we got home I explained all this to Mr. Merchant, and we spent an evening of vigorous discussion. He rolled me over, so to speak (I have got into the way of explaining all forms of hyperbole), and trampled on me.

“What you long-haired chaps don’t see—” he began.

“Now, if I am to stop calling you and your friends fat you must stop calling mine long-haired,” I interrupted.

“Very well,” he agreed, “but what you and your friends don’t see is that there must be different kinds of people to keep things going. You can’t have every one alike.”

“God forbid!” I said, “no one ever suggested it.”

GEORGINA BROWN

“Now suppose one of your long-haired friends came into my office—”

“Yes,” I said, “or suppose one of your fat friends came into my studio—”

“Just so,” he replied. “Well, they’d both be fish out of water, wouldn’t they?”

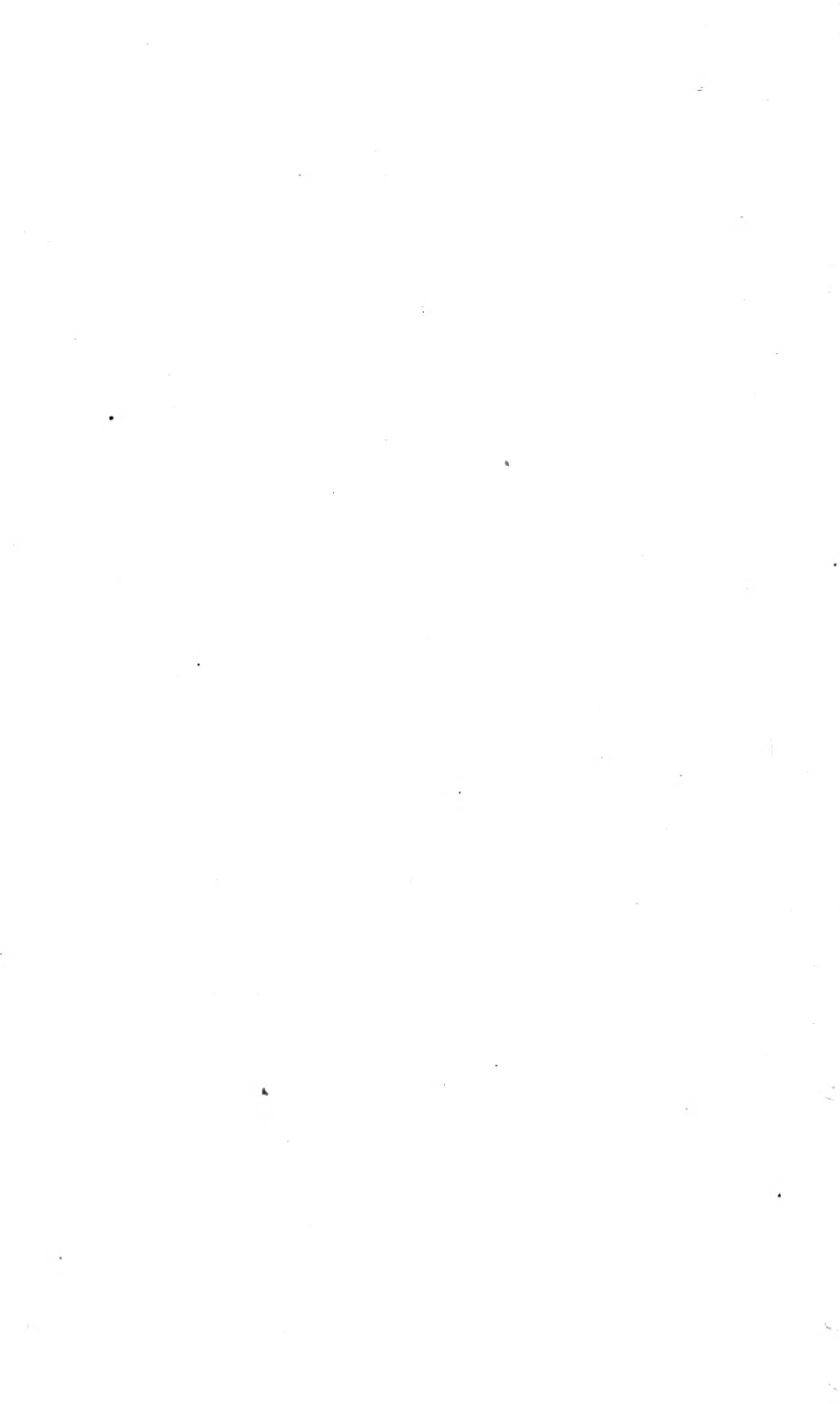
“In a state of chaos,” I explained, “animals, birds, fishes and so on lived together, and such as could not agree ate each other in silence. Later in history they became civilized and masqueraded in one another’s skins, and we are led to hope that, by and by, the lion will lie down with the lamb, and the merchant and the cockatrice——”

The angry butler came in just then and Mrs. Merchant gave a slight cough and frowned at me, so we never finished our discussion. I shall be sorry to leave them.

Good-bye,

Yours ever,

GEORGINA.



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